

# WHO Tells YOUR Story?

## June 14 and 16, 2021



Leslie Lipson with Lipson Advocacy consulting with Katie Chandler from Sangha Unity Network developed curriculum to teach self-advocates a basic foundation of Social Role Valorization, the power of imagery and the influence and impact of media telling stories about people with disabilities.

Self-advocates were invited to help change how stories are told about people with disabilities. The 2-part workshop focused on what makes a valued story, one that focuses not on labels, but on gifts, contributions, and possibilities.



### Participants included:

- Andrew Dixon, Stone Mountain
- De'onte Brown, Atlanta
- Derona King, Atlanta
- Doug Crandall, Douglasville
- Gillian Grable, Atlanta
- Marilyn Freeman, Rome
- Jon Benjamin, Loganville
- Kayla Rodriguez, Buford
- Kenneth Mitchell, Atlanta
- Nick Papadopoulos, Royston
- Sandra Akinde, Powder Springs
- Shelia Jeffrey, Stone Mountain
- Susan Berch, Atlanta





- We care about people who have disabilities.
- We need to understand the impact and wounds that come from assumptions being made about people.
- We want people to be seen in positive, enhancing ways and valued for their gifts and contributions.
- We do not want to add to harm by reinforcing or perpetuating negative stereotypes.
- “We must be true to people. And consequently, our stories about them must be true.” - Burton Blatt

On the first day of the workshop, we talked together about what our society values and what we don't value. We shared John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien's work from the Five Valued Accomplishments and talked about what we're moving away from (people being isolated, excluded, rejected, seen as incompetent or incapable, having no power, and having low expectations from others).

We went through a list of dangerous assumptions that are often made by others about people with disabilities. When these assumptions get portrayed in media, it reinforces harmful stereotypes.

Participants shared stories describing experiences of how they have been treated based on other people's dangerous assumptions and harmful stereotypes.

## Dangerous Assumptions

### People with disabilities are seen & treated as...

- A burden to families, service providers, healthcare system and society in general
- Eternal Children, child-like
- Lifelong dependent “clients/individuals” of human services
- Not Competent, unemployable, incapable
- Dangerous, threat to society
- Sick/Diseased/Contagious
- Object of Ridicule, Trivialized, to be made fun of
- Belonging only with others with disabilities
- Underserving of medical treatment, lacking quality of life, or not having lives worth living

We finished our first session with a homework assignment asking folks to find examples in media showing people with disabilities in harmful ways that reinforce negative stereotypes.

Participants shared their homework examples in small groups at the beginning of our Part 2 Session. We had rich conversation about the impact of such stories being told

## Stereotypes in Media




through media, the power in images, and how these harmful stereotypes about people with disabilities are perpetuated.

We learned about how we process images and the filters in our minds that impact whatever it is that we are observing. We make judgments as observers, often unconsciously, based upon our previous

experiences with what we are observing, what's happening in the current physical environment, and in the social environment that includes our values, expectations, and norms, *in addition to what we're actually observing*. We analyzed the power of images using many examples and discussed that images have positive or negative associations and emotions in the mind of the viewer.

We demonstrated how people are seen as the images that surround them. How we are seen or imaged gets filtered by the observer who makes a judgment about whatever or whoever they are observing. This judgment made by the observer ultimately impacts



- 90% of the information processed by the brain is visual.
- It takes only 13 milliseconds for the human brain to process an image.
- The human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text.
- 80% of people remember what they see, compared to 10% percent what they hear and 20% percent of what they read.
- Humans are judging beings. We observe something and immediately begin to make both positive and negative judgments about what we observe.



how people are treated.

Burton Blatt wrote extensively about storytelling and how stories are told about people with disabilities. He said, "Some stories enhance life; others degrade it. So we must be careful about the stories we tell, about the ways we define ourselves and other people." We shared Burton Blatt's Storytelling Truths that he articulated for:

- People about whom stories are told

- People who would tell stories about others (and their obligations in telling stories)
- People who hear stories about others

Participants talked about how we do not want stories that reinforce negative stereotypes and cause harm to people with disabilities. Using the *Principles, Beliefs and Values of Self-Advocacy* as described by Inclusion International, we conveyed how stories should be written about people with disabilities. Stories that illustrate that people belong, are capable, have gifts and skills to offer and contribute, and have autonomy.

## Harm of Storytelling

I have attempted to show why stories must be true, why false stories— for bad or good— cause harm, how false premises lead to false conclusions, false treatments.

- Burton Blatt



### Making our own decisions

Stories should show that we must be listened to as we express ourselves and our autonomy.

Stories should not indicate that doctors, service providers, or parents are in control of our lives.





### Identity First

Stories should showcase people's identities beyond being a client.

Stories should not convey that we are defined only by our disability or perpetuate stereotypes.





### Being Valued

Stories should show that all people have the right to be valued as an equal in their own community. Other people must learn that we are people and treat us in the same way as everyone else.

Stories should not bring back old, negative stories or stereotypes of people with disabilities as somehow less than human.



### Empowerment

Stories should show people with disabilities as empowered people who have autonomy and make decisions.

**TAKE RISKS.**



### Learning and Living Together

Stories should show that keeping people apart from their communities is NOT acceptable. Tell stories about people with disabilities doing the same things as everyone else and sharing the joys of daily living.

Stories should not highlight special programs only for people with disabilities because people then believe that is what we need.





### Institutions are Harmful

Stories should tell the truth about harmful institutions and congregate, segregated facilities for people with disabilities.

Institutions remove all of the things worth living for – joy, happiness, love, tenderness, feelings, emotions.



We wrapped up our workshop with an exercise created by the National Center on Disability and Journalism where we edited a news story that was written about a person

with a disability. All participants picked up on the harmful language that presented the person with a disability as “suffering, dangerous, incapable.”

We edited the sentences while keeping the relevant details in the news story showing that the story could be written in a way that does not reinforce negative stereotypes about people with disabilities.

### We received the following feedback comments from participants:

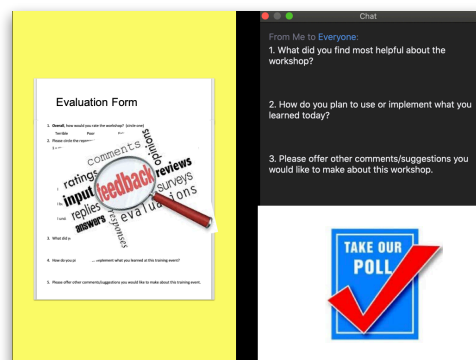
"I am grateful to have been able to witness the launch of this moment. It feels like the beginning of something important."

"I learned more about how we see each other and how media influences others about how they see people."

"What I found was helpful was informing me how media influences how we see disabled people. I'm planning to use the language to make sure we have autonomy when I share my story and when others share their story, to make sure they share their life experience."

"I just want to thank you all for teaching the Value of Story telling, sharing your stories, comments, questions, etc. I thoroughly enjoyed this two-part class & spending time with all of you. I especially want to thank Leslie, Katie, Gillian, & Derona to take the time to teach us the important tools that we need to know about."

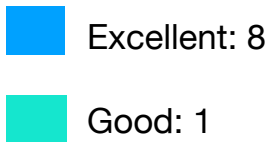
"What impacted me was picking out certain areas of the article where that could be construed as offensive to people with disabilities."



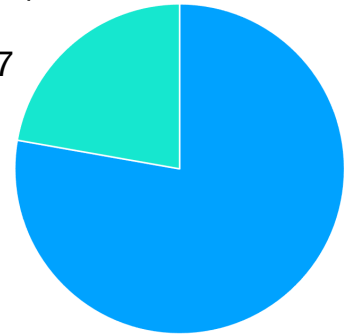
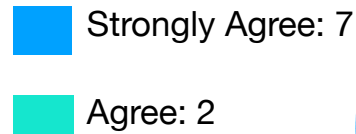


## Zoom Poll Feedback Results:

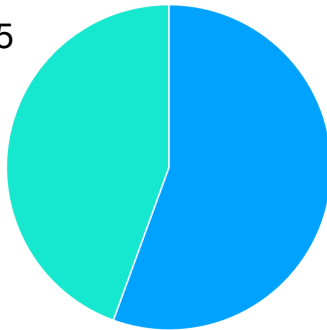
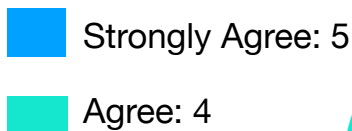
How would you rate the workshop?



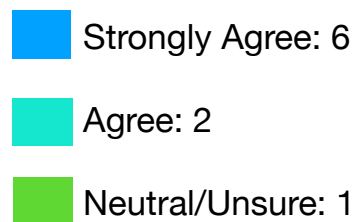
I understand the needs and the power in "Telling the Valued Story."



I am more familiar with dangerous assumptions and stereotypes in media.



I know more about what our society values and doesn't value.



*thank you*



### **Katie Chandler, LCSW**

Katie is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who works with Sangha Unity Network as a Project Consultant. She is a member of TASH and previously directed the Developmental Disability Program at the Georgia Advocacy Office, Georgia's Protection and Advocacy Agency. Katie uses the principles learned from Social Role Valorization to support people with disabilities to have full, meaningful, inclusive lives and to teach and mentor human service professionals.



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### **Leslie Lipson, JD**

Leslie is an attorney, a member of TASH, and a self-described inclusionista. She has been deeply involved in advocacy for and with people with disabilities over the past 20 years, spending the majority of her career at the Georgia Advocacy Office. Leslie founded Lipson Advocacy: Education, Legal and Strategy Specialist, where she offers advocacy solutions from a values-based foundation using general and special education law.

**LIPSON**  
ADVOCACY



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