



Advocating for
disability civil rights
since 1979



DISABILITY RIGHTS EDUCATION & DEFENSE FUND

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In This Issue

Media and Disability

DREDF eNews

Dear Friends,

At DREDF we have been thinking a lot about the role media plays in our movement since we talked to individuals around the country in 2006 about the state of public awareness of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

What we learned inspired us to launch a media program.

The freethinking advertising guru William Bernbach (1911-1982) said of American media:

"All of us who professionally use the mass media are the shapers of society. We can vulgarize that society. We can brutalize it. Or we can help lift it onto a higher level."

His observation remains true, and as disability rights advocates, we need to pay attention.

While the disability rights movement has made enormous strides in the past 30 years using law, policy, and civil rights advocacy as our primary tools, our message has yet to capture the hearts and minds of the general public. This important goal will not be achieved until our movement successfully challenges the misrepresentation, defamation, and invisibility of people with disabilities in media and popular culture.

Too often, media stories involving disability create a sensation, not because the story is sensational, but because the coverage trumpets disability stereotypes. People with disabilities are seldom portrayed as individuals beyond the framework of their disabilities, which often are described only as negative attributes to be overcome. This narrative is rooted in our nation's legacy of demeaning and isolating people with disabilities, which has left in its wake inaccurate and outdated beliefs and attitudes about what it means to live with a disability. Regrettably, the media frequently embraces and reflects these attitudes in its coverage.

DREDF's new media project intends to tackle the problem. Fortunately, we have excellent company and experience to guide us:

[Simon Minty](#) is leading DREDF's Media Project.

To inform the direction of our project, Simon has talked to other civil rights groups that have taken on media reform and interviewed some key individuals in our community whose work has changed how media portrays and reports on disability:

- **Mary Johnson**, Editor of [Ragged Edge](#)
- **Patricia Bauer**, journalist and editor of www.patriciaebauer.com, a website of news and commentary on issues related to disability

Resources

[DREDF's Media and Disability Project](#)

[Patricia E. Bauer](#)

[Beth Haller's Media dis&dat](#)

[Simon Minty's Abnormally Funny People](#)

[Ragged Edge Online \(archive\)](#)

[Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network](#)

[BBC's Ouch!](#)

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- **Beth Haller**, Professor of Journalism & New Media at Towson University
- **Suzanne Levine**, Founder of the National Center on Disability and Journalism
- **Joe Shapiro**, [Correspondent, National Public Radio](#)

Simon's interviews with these experts confirm that more in-depth and thoughtful media attention to disability is critically needed. We know that media can be a potent force in countering stigma and misinformation and a powerful ally in changing perceptions, eliminating discrimination, and raising public awareness we look forward to the challenge.

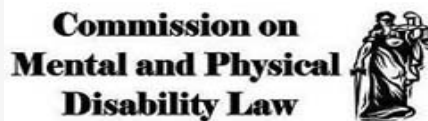
Do you have a favorite media story? [Share it with us.](#)

If you think it's time for our community to take advantage of the power of the media, please make a contribution by using the Donate button to the right.

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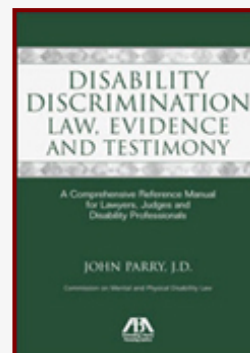
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