AccessABILITY Awareness Month Kickoff Opening Remarks

AccessABILITY Awareness Month is about becoming more cognizant of the similarities and the differences in the lives and experiences of people with disabilities. As the month unfolds, we’ll hear about some people who wear their disability proudly, and others who may not. We’ll hear about people who talk about the beauty of their experiences and others who may not find beauty in their lives. Some may see their disabilities as just another facet of their identity or just a regular part of their day-to-day life. Regardless, AccessABILITY Awareness Month is about allowing them the space to amplify their voices with a megaphone or to whisper their stories in another person’s ear if they so choose.

AccessABILITY Awareness Month is about recognizing that people with disabilities face baseless obstacles in our society. They face barriers to finding employment, obtaining adequate health care, locating housing, sometimes to simply living and breathing. They struggle to see themselves represented on television, in magazines, in the workplace and not only to see themselves represented, but to see themselves positively represented. If diversity is being invited to the dance, inclusion is being asked to dance, then positive representation is the DJ playing your favorite song and everyone getting to see you bust out your flyest moves. We need more positive representation of people with disabilities.

AccessABILITY Awareness Month is about understanding that we all have work to do and more of that work should be shouldered by allies to the disability community and not the disability community themselves. AccessABILITY Awareness Month is about creating allyship and strengthening the commitment of already existing allies. Today we’re going to be honoring members of the Guttman community who exemplify this commitment. We may not all feel comfortable being advocates, but we can all be allies. We all should be allies. We need to be allies. Because the disability community consists of our friends, our parents, our brothers, our sisters, our coworkers, our classmates, our peers. It consists of black people, brown people, white people, gay people, transgender people, gender nonconforming people, immigrants, men, women, young, old, rich, poor.

Disability does not discriminate, but society does. That’s why we have AccessABILITY Awareness Month. Disability intersects with every single racial, cultural, and social identifier that exists in our society and yet it is still very much oftentimes left out of the conversation when it comes to diversity. That needs to change. That’s why we have AccessABILITY Awareness Month. So as you partake in the various events here at Guttman, at other CUNYS, and wherever else throughout AccessABILITY Awareness Month, remember to have an open mind, ask questions, and find ways to keep the conversation going. Thank you.

Kristopher Robinson, CRC

CUNY LEADS Neurodiversity Advisor

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