

# SELF ADVOCATES NEWSLETTER

DON'T TALK ABOUT IT, BE ABOUT IT

## DIFFERENT ABILITY

BY MICHAEL HOWARD

I'm not against the word "Disability" but sometimes I have to say to myself, "I'm a person with a diffability of color." Sometimes "Dis" can be taken out of "Ability." I cannot advocate for others who may not have the same consideration as me. I'd advise my loved ones to be original with yourself. I mean we all make mistakes and have different issues but we're human beings also. "Diffability" can be a back up word for Disability. If the top 1% doesn't like anything that lifts me up in spirit, TOUGH COOKIES!

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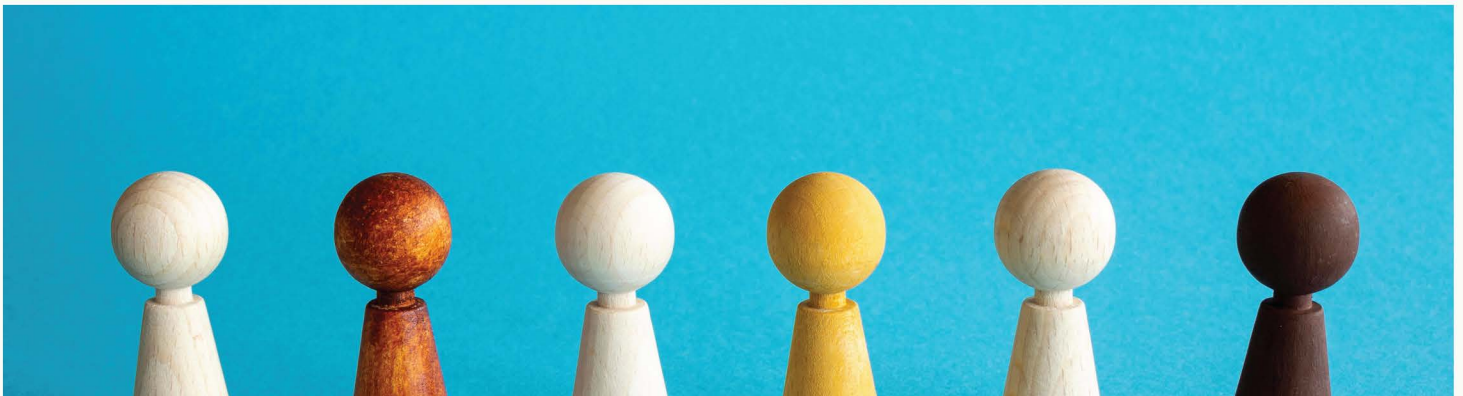
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# MY LATE FRIEND DEVON HERNANDEZ!

BY ROBERT CARDONA

Devon was a veryyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy close pal of mine for 18 years- he recently passed away 2 weeks ago from kidney failure at the nursing facility he was staying at in the Bronx the last 2 months of his life!

I met Devon at a socialization group at the YAI facility in the West Village on West 13th street - a group that was run by former YAI staff David Jay Smith. The group was run in 2003- that was the year I officially met Devon and we immediately became close-knit friends!

I had invited Devon over to my house over a period of years for regular monthly visits-as well as for my gatherings at my house- he was veryyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy much into his classic disco music (as I still am-hahaaaaaaaaaaaaaa). He alwaysssssssssssssssssssssss would not only play my disco music on my computer-but- he also played my vinyl albums. He also had a memory of old tv shows- he could remember the actual day and year the shows came out!



Devon also introduced me to 2 friends who I am still in touch with- at my 2006 New Year's Eve party at my house- Devon introduced me to both Noah Francis and Rein Negroni- I will alwaysssssssssssss be grateful to Devon for this!

Devon, buddy- you have made an impact on sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo many people's lives as you did my own. As close as you were to your family- you were like a brother to me, as well. Devon- you will be missed by all who loved and cared about you-including myself!

## OVERNIGHT TRIP

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD

I went on an Overnight Trip to Albany, New York on Monday February 13th to Tuesday February 14th, 2023. We stayed at the Hampton Inn Hotel for 1 day. I stayed in a room with Timothy Allen. We took the van to Albany, New York State. I have a disability, but I email to Timothy Allen about the Overnight Trip for information, before I packed my luggage.

I took extra money for the trip --- \$50 for breakfast, lunch, snack and dinner, We went to "Druthers" restaurant, They had a free buffet dinner on Monday February 13th. The breakfast cafeteria at the hotel was free.



Kenneth stands in the back row left of center in a red shirt with a large group of staff and self advocates in Albany

We went to an advocate event at the Egg Building and the Conference Center on Tuesday February 14th, 2023 in Albany, New York State. I met the people and some of my other YAI friends. We met Adriano Espailat in the Conference Room and we learned more about Group Homes, the Central Park Challenge, Arts Studio, Newsletter, Cooking Class, Self Advocacy, Training Program and ILSP from YAI. I did not see Allen, Michael, Steven, Rene, Jennifer, Robert, Ismael and Janelle in Albany, New York, as they went to the Rally.

I saw some disability people wheelchairs at the hotel in Albany, New York for overnight trip. I took my picture on my overnight trip. I posted my Facebook and Instagram on my phone for overnight trip. We will be going back on an overnight trip soon. We had a good time on the overnight trip.

## DRUMMING

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

I went to Beczak Environmental Education Center. I did the African drums and the leader said I have rhythm. They provided the drums for everyone who came. They came and they gave the drums African names.



Janice drumming

## HARRY BELAFONTE THE WORLD'S HOMEBOY

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

This past April 25th, 2023 Peter Keep, a news columnist from the New York Times reported this...

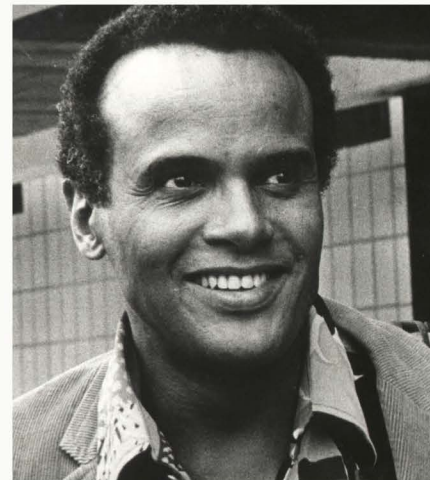
“Harry Belafonte, who stormed the pop charts and smashed racial barriers in the 1950s with his highly personal brand of folk music, and who went on to become a dynamic force in the civil rights movement, died on Tuesday at his home on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. He was 96. The cause of death as stated by his long time publist/spokesman Ken Sundshine, was congestive heart failure.

With a Tony, 4 Grammys and an Emmy on his wall, Harry Belafonte knows the power of hardwork”

What many people are not aware of is Belafonte struggled with dyslexia and dropped out of school at 17. He said, “I grew up in a school system where nobody understood the meaning of a learning disorder. I was constantly bullied. They just felt I was a misfit”

Yet look at this proud Human, Brother, Friend, a man who never turned his back on anyone! Whenever there was a rally for peace and justice, human rights, immigration rights, there was Belafonte! Back in the early 1980’s Belafonte joined with Tennis great Arthur Ashe to create the organization Artists and Athletes Against Apartheid. Their brochure states “Over 2 Billion people world wide stand with us when we say NO to the tyranny of South Africa”

Another interesting fact about Belafonte was that he never moved from his home on the Upper West Side of NYC. Many big entertainers buy huge houses or fancy country houses, but not Belafonte.



Harry Belafonte in 1970  
[Public domain / Arquivo Nacional  
Collection]

**Whenever there was a rally for peace and justice, human rights, immigration rights, there was Belafonte!**

On May 8th 2017, the New York Public Library Branch located at 203 West 115th Street was renamed “THE HARRY BELAFONTE STREET LIBRARY” That day he said proudly, “I am deeply honored that the City of New York has chosen to commemorate me by naming a public library in my name” The library system of NYC has been an integral part of my life.” I love New York City and I love the people of this great city”

Belafonte, New York City and this whole country loved you and always will! In Harlem there are streets dedicated to Malcolm X, Duke Ellington, Ruby Dee/Ossie Davis and a statue dedicated to Harriet Tubman. Belafonte, you deserve both a street name and a statue!!! You are a true HOME BOY!!! GOD BLESS YOU!!!! THE STRUGGLE WILL CONTINUE!!!!

## STACI

BY JENNIFER NAFTLOWITZ

I have met my friend Staci at two social groups called United Circle of Friends and Hankering for More. I started going there when I was about 16 years old. She was about 20. Staci and I have been best friends for a very long time. I am glad that I have a friend that I could hang out with because she lives down the block from me.

Jennifer and Staci have fun hanging out at each other's houses. We do a lot of things together. On February 9th I took her out for her 45th birthday at her favorite Japanese restaurant near our house. She is always there for me when I get upset about something. Staci was there for me and my mom when I lost my dad in 2016. I was there for her and her mom when she lost her grandmother. We go places like to baseball games, out to eat, and going to movies.

Before Sheldon passed away, our favorite place that we had been to the three of us was a basketball game to see the New York Liberty play at Barclays Center and also to see the Brooklyn Cyclones play at Coney Island. Then we got to sit with Sheldon in Section 12, Row F at the baseball game.

## BARBIE

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

Mattel has come out with a [Barbie doll with Down syndrome](#).

The maker of Barbies have been criticized in the past for Barbie having an unrealistic body.

The Down syndrome doll is part of a few Barbies with disabilities. There is a hearing aid Barbie and a wheelchair Barbie.

The Down syndrome Barbie is shorter, has slanted eyes and a rounder face. Her outfit is blue and yellow with butterflies, the symbol of the National Down Syndrome Society. Even her necklace has 3 chevrons which represent the 3 copies of the 21 chromosome the genetic material that causes the characteristics of Down syndrome.

I have Down syndrome and I think it will be good for Down syndrome children to play with a doll that looks like them.



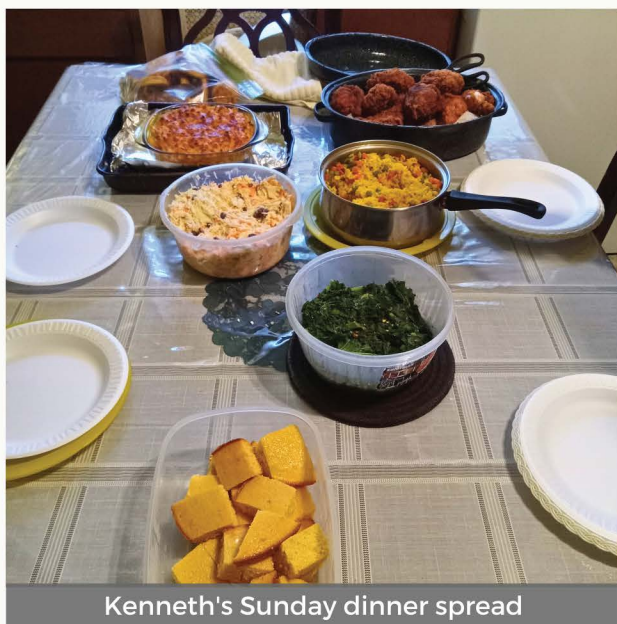
Barbie doll with Down syndrome from Mattel

## SUNDAY DINNER

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD

My mother went down south to Warrenton, NC to see her grandmother. So on Sunday February 26th, I cooked dinner by myself: Southern Fried Chicken, Homestyle Macaroni and Cheese, Vegetable Rice, and Coleslaw. My 2 young nieces and nephew brought the Kale Greens and Cornbread when they came to visit my mother's house for Sunday Dinner. I have a disability, but my mother showed me how to cook Sunday Dinner.

We are having Sunday Dinner again at my sister's house on Sunday March 26th, She's having Baked Ziti, Macaroni Salad, Cabbage, Rice, Fried Chicken, Baked Fish. My favorite Sunday Dinner are Fried Chicken, Turkey Wings, Beef Casserole, Collard Greens, Yellow Rice, Lasagna, Meatloaf, Macaroni and Cheese, Dinner Roll, Black-eyed Peas, Roast Beef, Roasted Potatoes and Cornbread. We had a good time at Sunday Dinner with my family.



Kenneth's Sunday dinner spread

## RENE

BY JENNIFER NAFTLOWITZ

I am writing an article about my friend Rene. People with disabilities can have deep relationships. My friend Rene is a very special friend to me because he is so sweet just like fruits. Rene has a wonderful mom named Griselda. She is a great and caring women. I have known Rene for about 10 years. We have so much fun hanging out together.

Rene and Jennifer have been hanging out a lot on the weekends. Last Sunday Jennifer and Rene went to Union Square and 14th Street and we did a lot of stuff. Griselda raised such a wonderful human being. She is lucky to have a great son. Rene is 56 years old and he worked at AHRC on Varick Street. He has 4 brothers and 2 sisters. Also he has a beautiful apartment on Post Avenue.

I have been talking to him a lot on the phone and seeing his nice smile on Zoom. Also he has a black belt in karate and he teaches people in karate the new moves that they do. I am so lucky to have him as a friend in my life. We go to the evening program together on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday. Plus a couple of years ago he asked me to his prom at his school and he was crowned king.

# IS IT HER OR SOMEONE ELSE? CANDACE OWENS ATTACK ON DISABILITIES

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

Whenever a person makes a statement about race or disability it's normally based on personal opinion. Commentator Candace Owens fits right in. Who is this person? We can find out in an article by Brittini Williams who is a reporter for BLAVITY.

On November 14, 2022, Williams wrote, "Candace Owens is a conservative political commentator and activist. She acted as the Director of Communications for Turning Point USA, a right-wing group that promotes far-right ideologies among college students in 2017. And currently, she hosts The Candace Owens Show on The Daily Wire."

I want to add that Owens is a vocal supporter of Donald Trump. She is a critic of the "Black Lives Matter Movement." She supported Trump's plan to build a Border Wall. Now she has gone too far! She has become very critical of people with disabilities.

Here's what happened: is part of an article written by Nancy De Vault March 24, 2023. Nancy De Vault, the managing editor of "AmeriDisability," reported on the introduction of "Skims." Skims is the undergarment brand owned by media personality Kim Kardashian. Kardashian launched its Adaptive Collection to offer customers accessibly constructed intimate apparel. Designed with those with limited mobility in mind, the line features an array of adaptive garments like a scoop bralette, thong, brief and boy short, with sizes ranging XXS to 4X.

**Now she has gone too far! She has become very critical of people with disabilities.**

The ad campaign was inclusive. Skims' advertisements included: Haleigh Rosa, a former reporter and founder of the For Everyone Foundation, serving people with spinal cord injuries and paralysis; Stefanie Schaffer, a bilateral amputee who authored the memoir "Without Any Warning: Casualties of a Caribbean Vacation"; and Pansy St. Battie, a burlesque performer who was born with hypermobility syndrome, a connective tissue disorder that impacts joints.

That's when Owens decided to share her disapproval.

Owens made nasty remarks "“I really I don't understand how far we're going to take this inclusivity thing, I really don't get it, and if I am wrong educate me,” “[A model in a wheelchair] seems ridiculous” and “Whose idea was this? Was it your idea? Okay, you're fired” What-the-blank was she talking about?!

Many in the disabled community were outraged! A wheelchair activist on YouTube said “You need to be addressed, How dare you make such a nasty statement, take a good look at yourself. You yourself are of color and you have also faced racism.”

Keely Cat Wells is a disability advocate who covers business, entertainment, advertising and media for Forbes magazine. She was furious about the Owens piece.

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Paula Carozzo, creator and disability rights activist with over 100,000 followers, said she was also outraged by Owens' comments. Carozzo has worked with several high-profile brands, including Google, META, Clinique, and Tommy Hilfiger, to promote disability representation.

Carozzo put it this way, "We've worked so hard for such a long time. No bully should be able to show-up and make 'assumptions' of what we need and want."

S.E. Cupp, a political commentator for CNN, stated, "It's bad she makes this these nasty ignorant remarks. What does she know about people with disabilities?" Then she added, "This statement was pure Garbage!" Actor Christina Applegate, who has multiple sclerosis, was so offended she checked in with this Tweet, ""Yes late Tweet. But woke to see the most horrifying thing. This Candace person making comments about companies who see we need help. It's f---ing gross," "She added If Candace wants to get on the phone with me to be educated on being disabled. I will not come with anger. I will come with love. Because she needs to hear that. I pray for her tonight."

I would add this, "MS Owens, do you know that all four presidents on Mount Rushmore had disabilities! Do you know that the great people of African Heritage with disability have made a tremendous contribution! People like Stevie Wonder and Harriet Tubman. Ms Owens, in my opinion, you either deserve a good book or a good whack on your rear end!"

## MY ALMOST LIFE - AND DEATH - EXPERIENCE

BY ROBERT CARDONA

Yesterday I went through an experience in the Independent Living apartment, that I've been in for 19 years, that will change my life forever!

I passed out on my kitchen room floor, my staff called the paramedics ASAP and we went to Kings County Hospital. I had a CAT scan test and bloodwork done. Had Bernice Alexander - my long-time staff of 19 years-not been in my house to save me I might have been dead right about now- and- you all wouldn't be able to hear me leaving singing Johnny Gill-type messages on your machines anymore- hahaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa. But really-there should be a CPR training course for people with disabilities-not just for staff in the residences and the group homes- but- in case of an emergency - know what to do-

- 1- Call 911 immediately
- 2- Stay with the person and support them

I am fine now. But, CPR courses should be MANDATORYYYYYYYYYY for people with disabilities!



First aid items



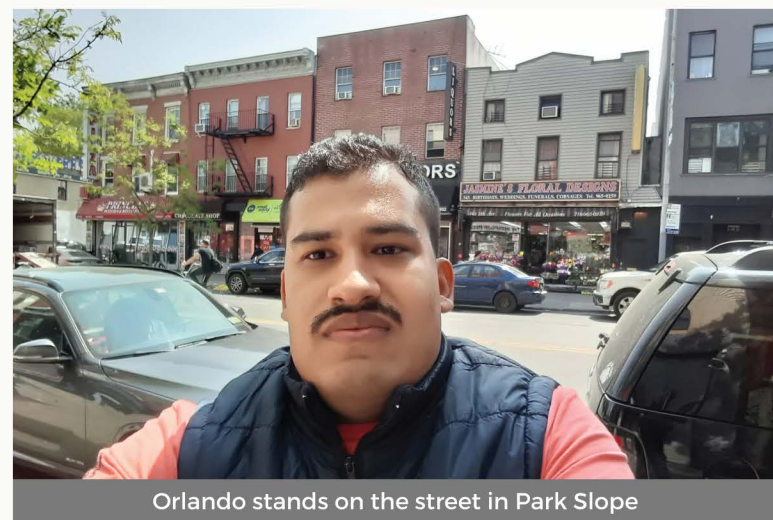
# MY 30TH ANNIVERSARY AT PARK SLOPE

BY ORLANDO JUAREZ

This year 2023 is the 30th anniversary of my arrival in Park Slope, it has also been 20 years since we left after the 2003 blackout. My mother and I first came to Park Slope in 1993. Even though I no longer live there, I sometimes enjoy visiting there for sightseeing and looking at the places that are still there that I am familiar with. Such as Princess Pizzeria of 535 5th Avenue and Lenny’s Pizza of 594 5th Avenue. A florist store Jasmine’s floral design is still there even from when I was a boy, and they still have good flowers. A pharmacy called Neergaard Pharmacy, is located on 454 5th Avenue, is good pharmacy that is where my mother finds medicines that could be useful, in fact that pharmacy has been there for over 100 years, and they even have a toy store on the 2nd floor.

On 7th avenue there is a middle school that I attended 23 years ago. It was middle school 88 at 544 7th Avenue on 18th Street. Middle school 88 even helps and supports children with disabilities. And there is even a comic bookstore called galaxy comics where they have some good comics. People who live there are close to Prospect Park which will take a few minutes to get there if they live at 5th 6th or 7th Avenue. There are other parks at 5th avenue between 4th street and 3rd street, and one at 6th avenue at the corner of 18th Street. They even have lots of trees and flowers.

My favorites places are my old house building 246 14th St, which I lived at from 1993 to 1999 and 530 6th Avenue which I lived from Fall 1999 to August 2003 on the day of the blackout. My favorite moments were in January 1996 New York had the biggest winter ever in fact the snow was covering the street on 5th Avenue, there were so many big piles of snow we took pictures of them. My second was The Fifth Avenue Street Fair. It’s event that only happens once a year in May, there’s food, stores opening, as well as music and fun activities. And finally on 2003 during my Middle school graduation, we had it at the Grand prospect hall, is a large Victorian style banquet hall, at Prospect Avenue, it was built in 1892 by a man named John Kolle, until in 2020 it got demolished even though everyone tried their best to stop it



Orlando stands on the street in Park Slope



Orlando at a park in Park Slope

and failed, even I should have been there to help. Park slopes even have some block parties which I enjoy them. However, My life at Park Slope had ended during the 2003 blackout when one of my old neighbors accidentally drop a candle and caused a fire, it was painful and was full sadness, my Family and I had to start our live all over again, even for my mother because she was depress but she still struggle while we were living one of my uncles at sunset park until April 2004. And so, I sometimes come to

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Park Slope not only for some errands or appointments, but to enjoy, relive, and cherish those moments and if there ever are new things coming to park slopes, I will be ready for them, and I will come to enjoy them, why? Because I always enjoy them and want to remember them no matter what.

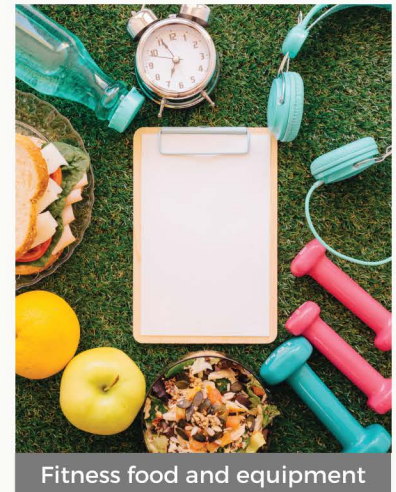
## HEALTHY LIVING

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD

I went back to my Healthy Living plan. I have a disability, but I told my family, I will do my Healthy Living. My family said yes! I started to read and learn about the different food groups. I also put on my face mask and went to Planet Fitness.

I've learned to eat right and smart. I eat fruit, vegetables and whole grains. I drink my healthy drinks, but I learned to drink slowly. My favorite exercises are sit-ups, push-ups, jumping jack, pull-ups, side by side, jogging and running. My favorite cardios are kettlebell, weight lifting, circuit training, treadmill, rowing machine, stair-stepper, cycling, stairclimbing and tread-climbing.

I went to a nutritionist, because my doctor told me to lose 15 to 20 pounds or more. I played tennis, basketball, soccer, bowling, hockey, baseball, volleyball, football & softball for healthy living. I followed my healthy habits and watched what I eat every day. I told my doctor, Can I drink my protein shake? My doctor says yes! I eat 1/4 of protein, 1/4 of starch and 1/2 of vegetables on my plate for healthy meal everyday. I drink plenty of water for every single day. I stay healthy and do the best I can.



Fitness food and equipment

## YAI ZOOM SUMMIT MEETING

ROBERT CARDONA

On April 19, 2023, I —for the first time— hosted the YAI Zoom Summit Meeting!

It was my first time in my 30 years in YAI that I had partaken in this event- having done all of the self-advocacy video-conferences- this was a bit of a stretch for me, all the time I had been attending the meetings I was only speaking in the group discussions- but- tonight- along with both Tim Allen and Katya Block- I was in the front-burner seat. There were guest speakers from the different regions from the advocacy groups in the Bronx, Brooklyn, or Manhattan group- talking about the upcoming Central Park Challenge event on June 3rd and the self-advocacy conferences coming up in September and October in Albany!

All in all- my first time hosting the meeting was a positive challenge for me, and- hopefully, again- in the near future- I will have opened doors for many more self-advocates to participate in self-advocacy events!

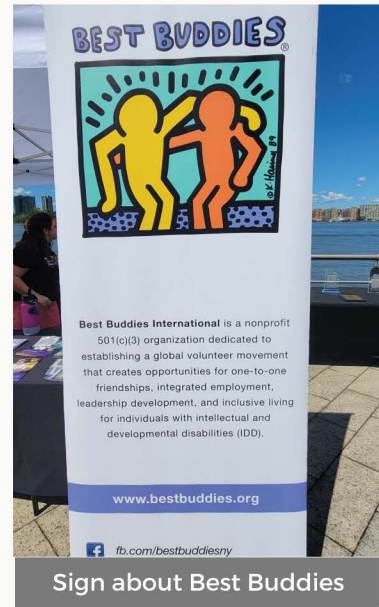
# BEST BUDDIES

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

I remember Saturday mornings growing up. I would wake up late, watch cartoons, maybe do some chores or do some homework. But on Saturday May 6th 2023 I had a fine reason to wake up early!

At Pier 62 where Chelsea Piers is located there is a sports complex. It was here that the annual Best Buddies walk took place! That day Mother Nature was on our side. The temperature went up to nearly 70 degrees. No sad faces, good people, SMILING FACES EVERYWHERE! HUGS AND KISSES, YOU NAME IT! What is Best Buddies? Well, here's their definition from their website: [www.bestbuddies.org](http://www.bestbuddies.org)...

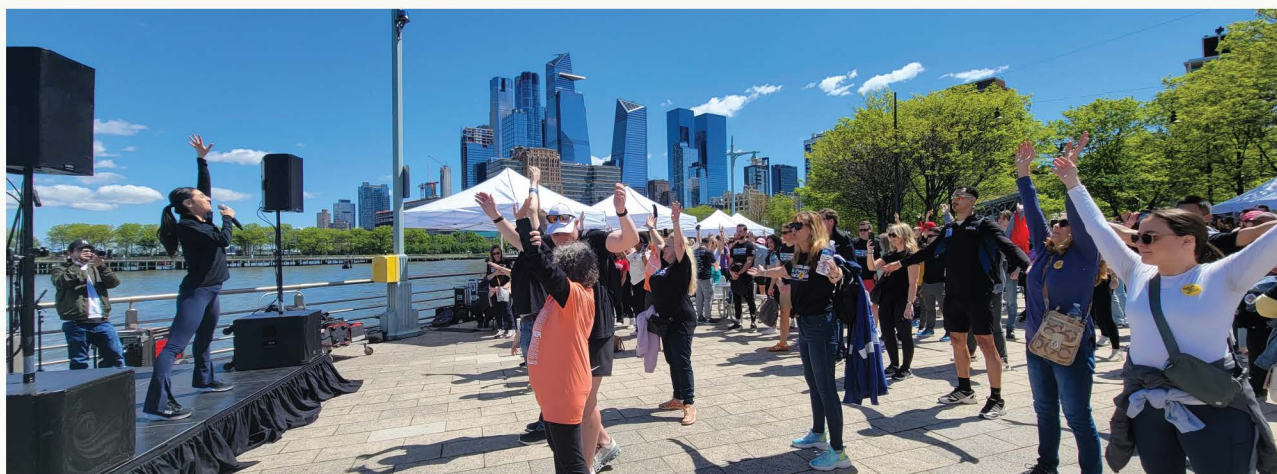
"Best Buddies International is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)." The day began with speeches, a live band, a quick workout with a presentation from one of the NEW YORK CITY ROCKETTE, and then the walk. Wow! Just walking was great. The sun was out, kids playing games, foods like pizza/sandwiches, plenty of water. Etc. The whole event ended at 1pm, yet for many of us we would've loved for the event to continue much, much longer!



Sign about Best Buddies



Ismael with Alex Levy from Best Buddies



Warm ups prior to the walk, by NYC Rockette