

SELF ADVOCATES NEWSLETTER

DON'T TALK ABOUT IT, BE ABOUT IT

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

BY ROBERT CARDONA

In regards to individuals with disabilities seeking paid employment, they shouldn't let anything or anyone stop them from achieving their dreams. As far as day habilitation programs or volunteer work is concerned, they shouldn't be the only options for people with disabilities.

People with disabilities shouldn't let anything or anyone stop them from achieving their dreams.

People in the disability population are not only allowed to have paid jobs, but, get them jobs they will feel comfortable with, not so much working at fast food restaurants, but get them jobs in lawyer's offices, or doctor's jobs. So, to all of you seeking paid employment, more power to you.

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MY 38TH BIRTHDAY**BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD**

Last year was my 38th birthday on Monday, November 30th, 2020. My mother, sister, father and grandmother wished me a happy birthday! I was born on November 30th, 1982 in New York City. My mother gave me an ice cream cake for my 38th birthday. Then, my sister and my nieces bought dinner and we celebrated on Wednesday, December 2nd, 2020 with strawberry cake. After dinner, we played game night.

My family sent me birthday cards and Facebook birthday wishes.

My mother said my friends could not come for my birthday. My family sent me birthday cards and Facebook birthday wishes. I learned to do video chat for my 38th birthday! My mother gave me my birthday gifts; an apron and a winter dress hat. I told her, "Thank you." She said, "You are welcome." My family sang to me happy birthday. My family and I took photos and video recorded for my 38th birthday. I blew out the candle and made a wish for my birthday. I turned on the song "Happy Birthday" by Stevie Wonder. I enjoyed my 38th birthday.



SEX AND MARRIAGE

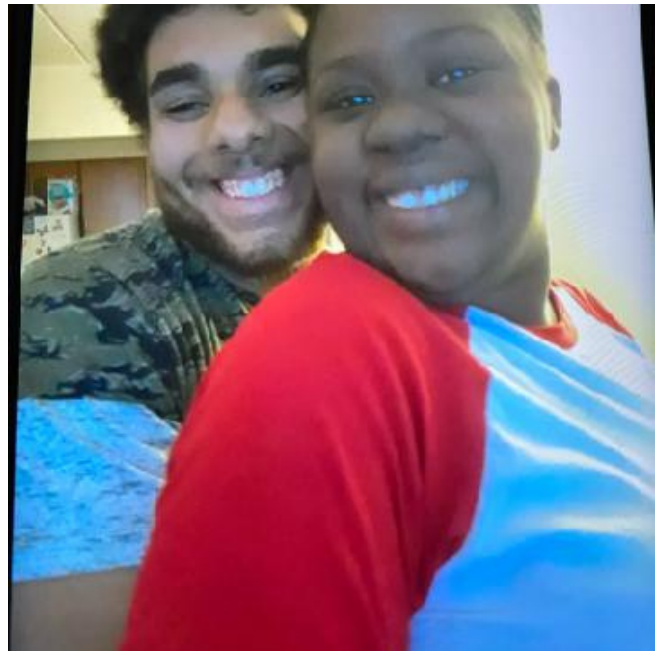
BY ASHLEY MURRAY

In today's topic we are going to break down three very important and crucial subjects that will relate to relationships. Marriage and Sex which have some similarities which I will discuss briefly and momentarily. Hello my name is Ashley and I am a proud distinguished and honored self advocate from the organization known as YAI. I like to write about real life stories and real life events. I am currently in a 4 year relationship with my boyfriend Lorenzo. The reason why I like talking about this particular topic is because one of my friends that I considered to be family oriented and very close is on the verge of getting married soon while the others are searching and looking for love in their own paths.

Three things that you should know about when discussing and talking about relationships, Marriage and Sex is that these things are an inevitability and are a natural part of life. Marriage is a covenant between two people. Relationships are just like marriage which in this instance are in love become intimately involved with no clothes on and become romantic in a more rapid and spontaneous way consisting of multiple movements and positions and shows romantic displays of affection by kissing, holding, touching, and verbalizing their love and feelings through expressions for one another.

Sex is a more sacred event which normally occurs when two people that are really in love develop a very strong connection attachment and bond that grows into something more special and serious which makes the sacred act more special amazing and more of a loving act between a person and their spouse.

While people out there struggle to find their missing significant other we encourage those in their pursuit to not give up in fact keep on believing and searching because at the end of the day the search and wait is worth it if you truly believe in True Love and sharing and spending an eternity with someone.



Ashley Murray with her boyfriend Lorenzo

The definition of a marriage is to love, honor and grow together and compromise, talk, communicate, explore but most importantly be happy and grateful that you found each other. And that the person gave you the opportunity to be in their life to appreciate the things that you and them have gone through, spending precious moments and memories and to uphold to everything that you discuss and to commit to each other that you are there for each other through all time difficult, good, bad, overwhelming, exciting, it doesn't matter what the situation is. The most important thing to remember is that the fact that you love them to keep on believing fighting and going through the trials and tribulations and everything that comes into a marriage. The true definition of a marriage is loving, supporting and sticking with each other through thick and thin no matter what life throws at you. In the face of adversity you and your significant other through commitment loyalty and honesty will prevail conquer and overcome all of life's challenges together as a successful and very proud married couple and team and know you overcame all of life's challenges. Our names are Ashley Murray and Lorenzo Meyers and We Approve This Message.

THANKSGIVING DINNER

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD

I went to my sister's house for Thanksgiving Dinner on Thursday, November 26th, 2020. My mother said she's not coming with me to Thanksgiving Dinner at my sister's house this year. She will be staying home and saving lives. For my mother, a little Thanksgiving Dinner includes whole chicken, stuffing, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, half of ham, cornbread, yams, fruit salad and plum cake. At my sister's house we had fried chicken, stuffing, collard greens, baked ziti, macaroni and cheese, crescent roll, sweet potato pie and soda cake. My mother said that nobody else came for Thanksgiving Dinner because of the Coronavirus this year. I went to get a big turkey on Thursday, November 19th, 2020. I learned to make the turkey parts for after Thanksgiving Dinner.

I am thankful to write for the newsletter, self advocacy, training program, ILSP Group and arts studio from YAI. We enjoyed our Thanksgiving Dinner.



INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA STINCHCOMB

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

Editor's note: Jessica Stinchcomb is YAI's Special Events Manager.

What is your educational background?

She went Our Lady of Peace High School then she went to the University of San Diego.

How did you get started with YAI?

She worked with Supported Housing for Homeless families before she did Regional fundraising for YAI and the Central Park Challenge.

When did you start doing presentations with colleges? What other places did you go to?

Jessica did go to make presentations at FIT and other corporations. The goal is to get them involved in YAI fundraisers.

What was your first job?

Her first job was working with homeless families in a Catholic community center called Breaking Ground for 5 years.

How do you feel about R word?

She said to erase the word forever.



Jessica Stinchcomb

SPEAKING OUT ON HARDSHIPS

BY ROBERT CARDONA



All throughout my childhood and teen and adult years, I NEVER had the ability to speak up to anyone, not even to my 2 older surrogate sisters. Since living in my own apartment since 2004 I've had major-league issues with staff in my house until an incident in 2007 where a staff sexually raped me in my bedroom and also verbally abused me, as well. Since then, I know I have the right to say, "I'm not taking any chances of getting my heart broken again." Now I have the ability to interview staff to see if they are going to be the right fit.

In my current residential housing situation, most of the time, if I'm not able to speak up for my rights, needs or wants,

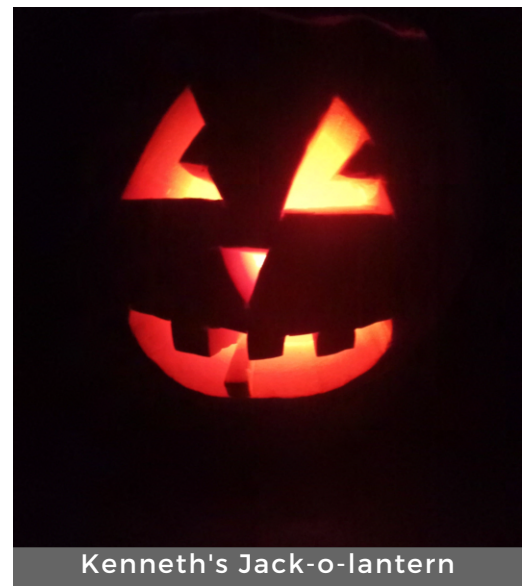
I have been finding myself, even during these hard times of crisis, writing numerous e-mails, notifications and whatever else it's been taking to get my message across that I want to be able to get the services I want, and, be chosen to not be treated like an infant.

Also, with the constant e-mailing and notifications that I have been sending to my agency's staff, in regards to services in my house, I'm now letting it be known that I'm not the 1 to be played around with or taken advantage of. And, also, I'm telling myself and others that, "yes, your voices can be heard, don't EVER BE AFRAID TO SPEAK UP FOR YOURSELF," because someone you know, whether it's a loving relative or best friend, might be going through something 10 times worse than you are, definitely pay attention to what is goin' on in your environment.

JACK-O-LANTERN

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD

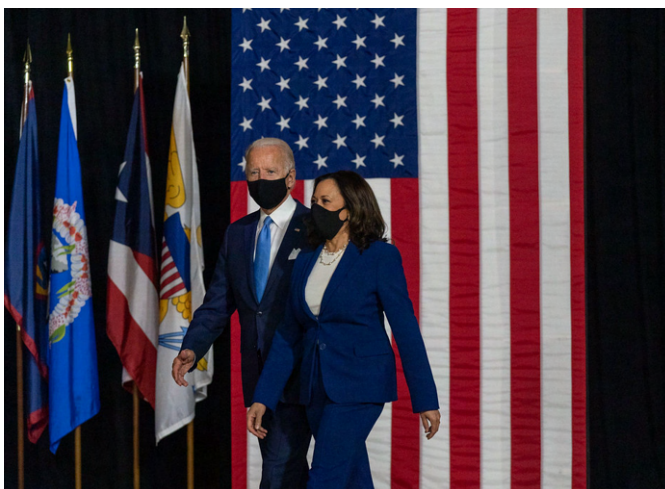
On Thursday, October 29th, 2020 I made my first Jack-o-lantern for Halloween. My mother said, don't throw away the pumpkin seed. My mother baked the pumpkin seeds after Halloween. I cut my pumpkin on top. Then, I took out the pumpkin seeds and made my Jack-o-lantern. I asked my mother, "Can I make my Jack-o-lantern for Halloween?" She said, "Yes!" My mother told me to clean the pumpkin seeds and soak in warm water and salt. I asked my mom, "Can I buy a big pumpkin at the vegetable market please?" My mother said, "Yes!" We enjoyed the Jack-o-lantern for Halloween.



Kenneth's Jack-o-lantern

NEW WHITE HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

BY MICHAEL HOWARD



Joe Biden and Kamala Harris

I'm writing an article about how I feel about the new administration (Joe Biden) after the old administration (Donald Trump) is very corrupted, very scary & very incomprehensible after I heard what happened at the DC capitol where 5 people were killed. Anyway, I hate to say this but the Biden Administration has a lot to prove. We have to be cautious with these half-measures/watered-down policies I don't like stacked against me. I don't know who President Biden appointed for the disabled communities.

BATBOY

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

This past September 19th 2020 in the Bronx, on River Avenue where the old Yankee Stadium was, "The Hispanic Heritage Baseball Museum Hall of Fame" held their annual awards and hall of fame ceremonies. I, a reporter who has in the past contributed articles in support of the museum, was given the honor of attending the ceremony. It was a perfect day: good weather, good people, as in every event it's always good to meet good people. That day I met Luis "Squeegee" Castillo, who was a batboy for the NY Yankees. He described his work, his organization, and his love for his son and family. That day I knew I met a good friend, and good people.

How did you become a batboy for the New York Yankees?

In July of 1997, I went with my friend Alex to one of the games. We ended up sitting in a lady's seat, without her permission. Her name is Tina Lewis (the Queen of The Bleacher Creatures). She told my friend, that we couldn't sit there. My friend ended up using profanity in response, so we got escorted out by security. The next day, I went back on my friend's behalf to apologize to her. She accepted me into the Bleacher Creature family. We became good friends, and I told her that my dream, was to become a Batboy for the Yankees. She said if I stayed in school and behaved, that she would help me write a letter to the Yankees front office. I ended up writing a letter to Sonny Hight. After two letters written back to me, on their 3rd letter they welcomed me to the Yankees baseball staff.



Luis "Squeegee" Castillo with his family

BATBOY (CONTINUED)

Wow that's gotta be an honor, how did you family and friends react?

They couldn't believe it and thought that I was lying. They didn't think a kid from the neighborhood was going to work for the actual team, and not as a security guard or anything else. Once they saw me on TV, they were proud that someone from our area had made it.

What is the name of the organization you created? Do you have a website? Is this non for profit?

My organization is called Squeegee's Children's Literacy Foundation. It was founded in 2013, and it is a nonprofit. Our mission is to enforce reading literacy in the urban communities. We often supply them the materials needed, to help them succeed and get further along.

The organization, does it work with people with disabilities?

Yes we do. We work with people who have autism and special needs, etc. We even do theater plays to raise money in order to help keep funding their programs or give scholarships, medical bills, and more.

You have a son who is autistic; that must be challenging for you and family, school, etc.

It is challenging at times but I've learned so much from him. I've been able to learn how to deal with him and his development. Children who have autism or other disabilities are special gifts from God, just like the rest of us. It doesn't make them different.

As you are aware there is a movement "To Erase the R word" (R meaning Retard). What is your reaction to that word?

My reaction is anger whenever I hear that. No one should ever belittle another person. That word shouldn't exist in dictionaries. It should be banned, and even illegal to use. I feel as if it's a term that can be considered a form of mental abuse for a child or adult.

Any message you like to send to all people with disabilities (like myself) and others and Latinos with or without disabilities?

Always remember that you are loved. You serve a purpose here, for the Lord above. Never let anyone tell you otherwise!

COVID-19

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

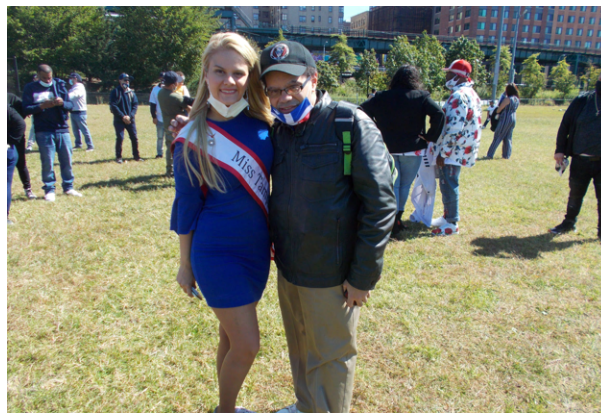
My niece Jessica was exposed to COVID, she had all the symptoms of it. I was scared because I thought I was going to get it but I did not. She had to quarantine for 14 days. She has now the antibodies in her system. She is going to get the vaccine for it when it's her turn. I come to visit her and I wash my hands and WEAR MY MASK.



RACHEL BARCELLONA: ABILITY BEYOND DISABILITY

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

Rachel is an Autism Advocate, Model, Author, Singer, Actress, Pageant Winner and an advocate for people with disabilities. Here she describes proudly of her talents and her own struggles having a disability yet coming out a winner. “I was diagnosed with Autism at the age of three and everything seemed to go relatively smoothly up until I was in 2nd grade. Epilepsy, a disorder that I’ve struggled with since 5th grade.



Ismael with Rachel Barcellona

My first seizure was terrifying, I had no idea what was going on and couldn’t imagine what it was like for my family who had to witness” Rachel explained. She went on to add: “I show people that I can do anything despite my disability. Be yourself no matter what, and don’t let others define who you are.”

She also sits on several boards, and has spoken at the United Nations on the subject of people with disabilities. Rachel currently serves as a board member for C.A.R.D. USF, Unicorn Children's Foundation, Els for Autism Center of Excellence, Dyspraxia Foundation USA, and works with The Global Autism Project and the Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism and Victoria's Voice Foundation. These organizations have impacted the lives of families and autistic children everywhere. The Unicorn Children's Foundation has raised a quarter of a million dollars to help donate to families who do not have money for the necessary therapies/resources for their children.

This past September 19th, 2020 near a park where Yankee Stadium is located in the Bronx NY, I was invited to an event put together by the “Hispanic Baseball Museum/History” honoring Latinos for their contribution to the Latin American community here in New York City. Rachel just sang the National Anthem, the event just finished and I sat down with her for 5 minutes and realized I’d just met a friend.

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

I go to the University of South Florida and I’m double majoring in creative writing and communications. School is very important to me, but I also love giving back to my community. I’m always attending events in my area concerning autism awareness and acceptance along with supporting many other organizations. I love to travel! I spoke at the United Nations about autism for world autism day, and I traveled to the Czech Republic to train autism therapists and speak about my experience.

RACHEL BARCELLONA: ABILITY BEYOND DISABILITY (CONTINUED)

What year were you named Miss Tampa? You have a good voice, do you sing?

I was named Miss Tampa last year and competed in the Miss Florida America pageant recently and placed first runner up! I am going back with the title of Miss West Coast Florida to try again...never give up! I really love to sing, especially opera! I've loved singing since I was really little, and I believe it all started from the therapies I did to help with autism. I would listen to opera tapes for hours on end to help with my fear of loud noises, and that inspired me to sing.

What was your inspiration in working with people with disabilities?

I started my platform "Ability Beyond Disabilities" when I was 12 years old because I was being bullied for having autism. I also noticed other people like me being bullied just for being themselves and I wanted to put a stop to what was happening to me as well as other people, I wanted to start a movement.

Do you or someone in your family have a disability? Learning disability or deafness?

My mom is deaf because she was struck with an illness when she was young, and it got progressively worse over time. I really love the deaf community because they're closely tied to those with autism; we have some similar co-morbid disabilities.

There is a movement to "Erase the R Word." What's your opinion on that word? Should it be removed, abolished?

I don't think it should be removed because there is a historical context for it. There are many languages that use the word "retard" to describe something that is slow moving, like Italian for example. We also see the word retard come up in music as a way to describe a slow musical progression. I think when we use it or any words to intentionally hurt other individuals we need to stop that behavior period!

What inspirational message you would like to say to anybody who has a disability, like myself?

Don't let anyone tell you how to live or how to be. You are not meant to be solved, because you are not a puzzle. You are a human being, and that is enough. Find your strengths and develop them over your lifetime; this will bring happiness if you are doing what you love and will hopefully lead to success in life. We all have our place in this world!

REMEMBERING SHELDON

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

Wow this past year 2020 was a rather sad year. Covid-19, jobs lost, no parades, no festivals. To add major league baseball lost seven members of the Baseball Hall of Fame: Lou Brock, Whitey Ford, Bob Gibson, Al Kaline, Joe Morgan, Phil Niekro.

Then about one week after New Year's Day 2021 I received a phone call from fellow Self Advocate Jennifer. She said: "Ismael your baseball partner in crime Sheldon Silverstein passed away." I stated "How!" I spoke to his brother Sandy who said, "Sheldon was in an accident, suffered a brain injury, the blood rushed to his brain as result he would pass away due to brain aneurysm."



Ismael with Sheldon Silverstein

It reminded me of baseball hall of famers who passed away, because Sheldon was a devoted baseball fanatic like myself. We would often go to baseball games both the NY Mets and the NY Yankees. He was always so happy! He didn't care which team won he was always happy!

Marina, a fellow Hankering For More member, said, "He was a devoted sports fan! He can tell all the stats, players names of the NY Rangers hockey team, NY Mets players, wow! He could've been a sportscaster." Jennifer a fellow self advocate/friend added "He was a good friend, he never said anything bad about no one. You Ismael he always told it was joy to have you as a friend."

Going back to his brother Sandy, "I remember he would call me all time. We talked about everything the main thing was sports and family. He loved his family his nephew so much! What's sad he'll never see his nephew grow."

For this reporter they said it all. I lost a friend, a baseball buddy, a person who always called me on holidays. Whenever I go to baseball game I'll always remember Sheldon.

It'll be hard. You're not there, yet I know in spirit your voice, your cheer, will be heard.

TRIATHLETE

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

A Florida man named Chris Nikic who is a 21 year old. Who has Down syndrome. Who has completed the Ironman Triathlon. He has made the Guinness World Records. He was considered a historic achievement by the Special Olympics. He swam 2.4 miles and biked 112 miles as well.



Chris Nikic, photo by Deuce Bradshaw @tampaphotographer