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I Can Hear You Now

By Anthony Richardson

(Anthony Richardson is co-founder and Executive Director of the Harlem based non-profit group "Perceptions for People with Disabilities")

I am a differently-abled person who is legally blind (20/60 vision), with a guide dog and hearing impaired. This was due to a severe case of meningitis in December 1997. In late 1998, I was discharged from a nursing home and began my quest of becoming a self-sufficient and independent differently-abled person.

Before being discharged in 1998, I was sent through several evaluations before being released. Some tests were how well did I see (to navigate and identify) and how well did I hear (for audible communication). Although these were major concerns, I just wanted to be discharged so that I could start exploring, and researching the programs and services that would be available for me to utilize.



Anthony Richardson, left, NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg, right, and guide dog Gino.

Although I am visually impaired and hard of hearing, I struggled more with my hearing loss than I did with my vision loss; the reason why is that it was difficult making the transition from being a visual learner to an audio learner. What compounded my difficulty was that I was not properly fitted with the right hearing aids. The set I was prescribed did not perform the way I had anticipated and I had trouble with word distinction.

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When my audiologist and I discovered the problem, I was prescribed a more advanced model which solved the problem and facilitated my going back to school and eventually starting a not-for-profit community based organization, Perceptions for People with Disabilities

(www.perceptions4people.org), which is an information and referral clearinghouse for people who are differently-abled (visually-impaired/blind, hard of hearing/deaf, physically and or mentally challenged living with HIV/AIDS).

While in the nursing home I decided that, when released, I wanted to continue my education and hopefully return to the workforce, but being differently-abled presented me with challenges related to my hearing loss e.g. how would I be able to go back to school, attend lectures and meetings while trying to change my mode of learning. To solve this problem, I started to research hearing aids to find the best possible product on the market that would accommodate my needs.

I finally found a set of hearing aids which have four (4) pre-set programmable functions, surround sound, music & TV, T-coil (for telephone) and FM Loop. This is really cool because at meetings or lectures the speaker wears a miniature microphone and I wear a receiver around my neck. As they speak, it is audible to me with no distortion whatsoever. I have to acknowledge that it wasn't easy finding or paying for the hearing aids, but with perseverance, persistence and the assistance of my counselor at the Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH), I was able to acquire the hearing aids.

Moreover, having these hearing aids has enabled me to become more involved in my community, church and business. The best thing about being able to hear better is, I don't have to keep asking people or my loving and supportive wife "what did you say," because I CAN HEAR YOU NOW ♦

Post Election Day Poll Suggests Need to Increase Training and Public Awareness of New Voting Machines for Disabled

By Brad Williams

A recent survey by Zogby International suggests that both poll workers and voters with disabilities in New York must have more training and outreach from the State and county Boards of Elections for the newly installed accessible voting machines (Ballot Marking Devices or BMDs).

Following Election Day 2008, NYSILC commissioned Zogby to do an interactive post election poll of 1,000 voters in New York. The survey results were compared to a similar post election poll conducted by the Arizona SILC.

The groups were asked a disability self-identification question. In New York, eight percent responded "Yes." This figure is not even half of the 17% potential turnout rate of voting aged New Yorkers with disabilities based on Census figures. In Arizona, 12% stated "Yes" to the same question which is much closer to the Census figure.

Overall, the 4% increase in Arizona voters with disabilities compared to their New York peers was seen as significant. It could be attributed to the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) being implemented in Arizona in a timely manner and citizens having more exposure to the new accessible voting systems. Conversely, New York State has been dragging out the HAVA compliance process. Accessible BMDs were just mandated one per polling place by court order for Primary and Election Days 2008 in New York.

For the full text of this article please go to this link:

http://www.nysilc.org/doc_uploads/NYSILC_2008_Polling_Press_Release.doc ♦

Street in New York City to be Named in Honor of Disability Rights Activist Frieda Zames

By Patty Black

On Saturday, May 2nd, 2009 East 4th Street in Manhattan will be co-named Frieda Zames Way. The general public is invited to attend and although an exact time is not yet set, it will likely take place around 12:00 PM. This event is being organized to honor the life and work of the *Disabled in Action* (a Metropolitan New York advocacy group) activist.

Ms. Zames was a devoted and prominent activist who co-authored a book with her sister Doris Fleischer in 2001 titled "*The Disability Rights Movement: From Charity to Confrontation*," which is an extensive history of the disability rights movement. In 2003, Zames received the Eileen Healy Public Service Award and wrote essays on disability issues while serving as a columnist for Able News, writing the "DIA Speaks" column. She also was serving as the first vice-president of Disabled in Action (DIA) when she passed away in 2005 at the age of 72.

Zames was described by family and friends as a sweet, generous and kind hearted spirit who maintained wonderful qualities despite the hardships she endured in her life. She earned her bachelor's degree in mathematics from Brooklyn College, where she graduated with honors. Zames went on to earn her doctorate degree in mathematics from New York University and won an award for a paper she wrote on mathematical paradox. While employed at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, she helped make the buildings there accessible for people with disabilities. She taught courses there ranging from remedial to graduate, and ran a summer program to bring students with disabilities into the student body. When she retired she was associate professor of mathematics emeritus.

Zames first activist action came in the 1970s when she blocked a bus with others

because they couldn't ride in it due to lack of a lift. When she first went to Disabled in Action meetings, she sat in the back to absorb all that was happening until she learned what was going on. She was later president of DIA many times throughout her decades long association with that organization. Zames also started the "one step" campaign which forces businesses into compliance with access laws. Due to this campaign, more than 350 businesses in New York were forced into compliance.

Her longtime friend of 60 years, Robert Levine, stated that Zames wanted to make the world accessible for everyone. He pointed out the time she had sued the Empire State Building to force them to create access and had won. Shortly before her death, she had been working on a city council bill for accessible ferries and taxicabs ♦

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