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**Training on Intersectionality among Women and Girls with Disabilities**

January 26, 2019

>>[DEBBIE FINK]: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Debbie Fink. I'm the Director of Community Outreach & Impact for RespectAbility, and the Project Director for our unprecedented *Women’s Disability Leadership, Inclusion & Advocacy Training Series.* On behalf of RespectAbility and our host and our generous funders, New York Women's Foundation and the Coca Cola Foundation, and many collaborating organizations, I'm thrilled to welcome you to this ***very first*** of six trainings in this series!

At this time, I also want to please invite you to silence your cell phones. Thank you so much. Whether you are joining us here in person or virtually via the webinar, we are confident that you will grow from this experience. Of note, our webinar will conclude after Dr. Walton finishes up her Q&A. Thank you in advance for filling out the survey and please complete questions only relevant to part of the training covered in the webinar.

To set the stage, I want to define two terms in the title. ***Allies.*** Such as allies of women, people with disabilities, people of color, people in the LBGTQ community, allies “*learn from that individual and group and amplify their cause.*”

The term ***intersectionality*** was coined by Kimberly Crenshaw, law professor is social theorist in her paper: “*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”.* Dr. Walton will define this further, soon. Before Dr. Walton takes over, Stephanie Farfan will present statistics and Vivian Bass will introduce Dr. Walton. Thank you and I now pass the mic to Stephanie.

>>[STEPHANIE FARFAN]: Hello, everyone. My name is Stephanie Farfan. I am skipping through our bios that can be found online for everyone. Okay. So I want to start off with key facts from New York City. These are things that I think we should know and help to set the stage. There are almost 500,000 women and girls with disabilities in New York City. Women with a disability on average earn $9,000 less than without disabilities and 44% of women with disabilities live below the poverty line and only 29% of African American women with disabilities are employed and 24% of Latinas have jobs.

So is there anyone from Brooklyn here? Oh, okay. We have a few from Brooklyn. Average income for women with disabilities in Brooklyn is $26,566 a year. That is 28% less than women without a disability. So is anyone from Queens? Hi. Average income from Queens is $24,073 per year that is 24% less than women without a disability. Anyone here from Manhattan? Oh, okay. Yay! So Manhattan, the average income for women with disabilities is $23,715 which is 54% less than women without a disability. That inequality is massive. Anyone from the Bronx? Average income is $21,151 per year for women with disabilities. Which is 28% less than women without a disability. Anyone from Staten Island? You don't have to be from Staten Island? $21,151. That's 32% less than women without a disability.

Let's go into gender based violence. All these stats are on our website that you can view at RespectAbility.org. Now let's talk about adding the disability lens towards intersectionality so this is where we are going to talk about what you can do.

You can commit publicly advocate for inclusion of people with disabilities and send a message that people are of equal value and must be respected and heard fairly. This is especially true for women with disabilities and especially with our advocacy is crucial. Disability impacts [unintelligible] and much more effective.

So **identity language preference**. Important to know if you prefer person first or identity first. A lot of people have different preferences. I prefer identify first. Really depends on who you are. We do have a webinar on disability etiquette that is also on our website.

Now, we are going to talk what an inclusionist is. Someone that works with organizations and agencies to advocate for all people with disabilities. Requires you to see beyond your own disability and your own accommodation requirements and learn about other disabilities and how they intersect with yours and their accommodation requirements. We do have this resource online as well.

We can also talk about ensure digital accessibility. We need to learn how to identify digital accessibility and who to contact and make a change. If you are not able to do that, there are other things you can do as well. You can caption videos if you have a few minutes of your time. You can do a few minutes of captioning. We do have resources online for this.

So we are also going to ensure [unintelligible] by calling up to ensure that there is accessibility even if it's things *you* don't need. We have these resources online.

>> **Disability access checklist.** Everyone in the room has received a copy of this in their package. Available online and on the PowerPoint if you requested the PowerPoint before.

Hello?

Okay. Sorry for that. We have a bunch of resources available on our website. We have a list. It's available in Spanish and everything. Parents and future employers, you can go on our website and find that as well.

Okay. Now I will have the pleasure of introducing Vivian Bass who will introduce Dr. Donna Walton. Thank you.

VIVIAN BASS: Greetings! I’m pleased to introduce Dr. Donna Rena Walton, Ed.D., who is the author of her newly released book *Shattered Dreams, Broken Pieces,* an eye opening tale of reinvention that chronicles the decades Walton spent working to rebuild her world through disasters, setbacks, trials, and tribulations after a dangerous form of bone cancer threatened her life and forced the amputation of her left leg above the knee.

RespectAbility is pleased to give you your own copy of Dr. Walton's book. She will be available to autograph your copy later today. Overcoming her triple jeopardy is where she is today. She lives by the motto: *What's a leg got to do with it?*

Founder and President of Divas With Disabilities, Inc., Dr. Walton has made an unprecedented impact in the disability and women of color communities as a hub for thoughtful discussion on issues, self-love, and shaping the perception of what “disability” looks like by promoting women of color through various media platforms. Her work has increased access and inclusion opportunities in countless industries that have traditionally marginalized the participation of the women she represents.

In 2017, Dr. Walton joined RespectAbility's Board of Advisers to advance opportunities for people with disabilities. Dr. Walton is currently producing a film documentary called Divas with Disabilities that explores the lived experiences of African American who live with physical disability in the United States.

Dr. Walton earned her Bachelor's Degree and a doctoral degree in counseling from Georgia Washington University. Welcome, Donna. Take it away!

[applause]

>>[DONNA WALTON]: All right. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you very much for that welcoming introduction. Always good to hear yourself read out loud. I'm proud to be here this morning and to serve to this platform to discuss intersectionality. On the count of three, I need you to say, *I am enough!* 1, 2, 3.

>> *I am enough!!*

>> That's not loud enough.

>> 1, 2, 3.

>> *I AM ENOUGH!!!*

>>Better! I'm going to begin this talk with a quote by Dr. King. *Our nettl​esome task is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power.* I start off this quote because Dr. King's quote is intended to galvanize a movement of people in a turbulent time. I think this quote is most befitting of this audience because the strength and character and spirit that takes women of disability to live at the intersection of marginalized identities.

So it is very important for us to know and *believe* that we are enough. Now, I have not always believed that I was enough. The messages have been inundating. On my journey for over 43 years ago, that's when I incurred my disability -- in 1976 -- I have encountered numerous negative, negative messages that told me that I was *not* enough. But I'm here to tell you today, I *am* enough!

*You* are enoughI *We* are enough! I'm going to give us examples of my past. About the messages. Where some of these messages came from . . .

Let's start with a female rival who told me that *I was less than a woman because I have one leg*. Okay. Now, I'm not going to go into the conversation about what I had with this young woman.

There is a university administrator who denied me a program because he did not feel that I was smart enough. Now, let's talk about the employer who discriminated against me because hmmm, let's see. I wasn't qualified or perceived that I was overqualified. Get that. Or hired me and placed me in positions that were beneath me. Because of his perception, of course, that I was not competent. And I didn't have the ability. Possibly not. And the motto, *what's a leg got to do with it?*

Okay. Now, the boyfriends. Don't forget the boyfriends who could not fathom the one leg thing. Even when I told them that *my leg just got tired and walked off one day.* They could not deal with that. They left me. That's okay.

But I want to talk about one particular message from a second grade student. Even though he did not know at the time how impactful that message was, when this young boy, and I would say a young white boy, six years old walked up to my desk, walked up to my desk in my space and said to me, *Ms. Walton, no man will ever marry you because you have one leg.* Now the reason why that message was so injurious, think about the imprints that he has added to his already path. He has taken this message at the age of *six* and had already internalized this. He's going to grow up -- if no one stops these misconceptions – thinking about girls, women, who are living with disabilities whether it's one leg, one arm, doesn't matter. Put that into our plate. Take that into our organization and he becomes that person that continually perpetuates that stigma against women and girls who deal with disabilities.

Now I say to you that I wasn't always on this path of knowing I was enough. Not going to lie to you at all. There was a time when I lost my leg to bone cancer. Left leg amputated above the knee. When I came out into the world, I wasn't ready. I wear a prosthetic limb and it looks good. You can could say sprained ankle. Knee. Never does one know that I'm an amputee. I hid behind that wall for a while. It was easy. I was not proud of my identity of being a disabled woman or young girl.

I want to let you know that the journey did not always begin with thinking I'm enough. I did not always think that I was enough and I hid behind walls. Here is a story. I would show up on blind dates. Have to be blind dates. I did internet dating. I did that too. Way I would do that, again, only develop my self- confidence, I arrive at my date very early. They know what I'm talking about -- some people here. I would be sitting here perched in my chair. Perfectly perched so that he would not see me, walk in and have that automatically, you know *I'm not dealing with a woman that is limping.* All those questions that come with that.

I want to let you know that it was not always an easy road of disclosing. **Now I have found power in self disclosure. There is power in that. When you show up, you want to show that you occupy this space confidently and boldly and you deserve to be in that space unapologetically.**  **I'm a black, disabled woman *and I own it. You* own it. *We* own it. That's the only way that society at large gets it. If we don't, they will not.**

Just want to lay that on you for a second. Now, I talked about me hiding my disability. I talked about given you a little bit of information where I started and where looks like and how it changed. Talk about intersectionality. Talked abou -- I'm going to call the *Mother of Intersectionality*. If we are not intersectional, some of us, the most vulnerable, are going to fall through the cracks. Very powerful.

When some people face prejudice, things overlap. A woman with autism, woman of color and older transperson can face prejudice due to their overlapping social identity.

What's more, the way that a woman of color experience gender discrimination is different from the way that white woman experiences it. Let me tell you what it looks like for me as a black disabled woman. I know one of them is working against me. I don't know which one is. When I walk into a room for an interview and I'm denied that job, I walk out not knowing. That's a double negative. I walk out of that room and I'm totally [unintelligible]. I don't know if I was not hired because of my color. Black woman. Okay. Got that. I don't know if I wasn't hired I'm a woman or perceptions I should not have that job or because of my disability?

I don't know. So the overlapping identities are always clashing. They are always in the way and you have to learn to navigate those. There is a way to navigate those. I don't ever want to make it that it's *simple.* I do want to say that it's *possible.* I say that because I have been on this journey for 43 years. I have been out there for 61 years. I put it out there. That's between us.

I have learned that the best way to overcome any type of adversity -- whether it be discrimination, perceptions, misconceptions is *to own it,* show that you believe it, and show that you will not back down from it. Yes. I now say I'm a black woman with a disability and *what's a leg got to do with it?* What do we got?

So, great, what I want to be able to do is to give some strategy, right? And don't worry about writing this down because you will get a copy of them. They are in my book, by the way.

So and I'm not going to tell you what page because I want you to read the book. I want you to read the book. Sure.

So I want you to think about these strategies. These strategies that I'm about to offer give you specifics, organizations, I should say. Specific ways to move the needle closer to being inclusive. Reason you need to know those strategies, you can have them open when you don't see them. If you know, you identify the organization that you want to interact with.

I should say have to give a shout out to my activist [unintelligible]. Wonderful strategies that I'm going to share with you.

**Number one. Build diverse networks and subgroups.** For example. LBGTQ, African American groups. Ensure your organization near your community. Good example. *Nothing about us without us.* Right? I remember teaching at a university and I was only colored person on the staff. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. How can this be? This is impossible. I cannot represent all the community out there with just me.

[unintelligible] concerns without penalty by hiring an independent diversity manager. **Four, hold mandatory trainings on unconscious bias, ableism and white privilege.** I see heads nodding. [unintelligible]. **Number five, Please don't make a person a spokesperson of group or race.** You know how that feels. I cannot speak for all black people, y'all. I can't do it. Don't hold me accountable for that. Black folks are not [cannot understand speaker] that is impossible. all kinds of experiences.

**Number six,** **seek talent for university, disability organizations, and nonprofits.** Be an ally and use your privilege to your advantage to protect and advocate for people of color and disabled people. Number 8. Please don't ask what one's disability is in the workplace? Why? Because it's illegal. Now, that is from the organization standpoint. Let's move to your role, right? How do you engage in civic life? How do you show up unapologetically in your space or in the space that you want to occupy.

Research representatives. In your area. Local, state, national and cultivate relationships with them. Right? Get to know them. **Two,** there are tons of local organizations seeking members to expand their mission. I recommend searching for local community organizations and asking what type of support they need and how the nonprofit can provide it. **Number three**, mentor young people and work with community organizations. You get it, give it to somebody else. We help each other. I'm looking at wheelchair convene of New York. Okay. I look at her and her crown is growing. Her tiara is glowing at me. I have number **four.**

**Attend a local town hall. Public hearing for local governments.** One thing to know is that diversity does not exist without disabled. Lobby for inclusion for people to effectively come out of the closet. I'm not saying out yourself, but you got to know when had to when to show up. I can't be at the table if I don't let them know who I am. If no one knows I'm an amputee, how will they change that? I need to get in here. Things moved out of my way. You got to show up and got to tell the truth. You got to ask yourself.

We can talk more about that. How do you navigate coming out, if you will. Disclosure is not always that simple.

Let's see. **Four.** Maybe I skipped something. **Advocate by informing the audience that you don't get to determine who is disabled.** Here is the story about that. You can show up at a space [and think] what am I doing? Okay. This is hard for me with this little microphone. You can show up in these spaces and, Stephanie, you got me off my point more. **Four.** **Advocate.** You still have to determine. Who makes decision what looks disabled? What's disabled? [unintelligible] [very mumbled]

Show what disability looks like. Amplify the images of black women and women of color. To show that we do exist beyond what you perceive we look like. We want to be cast in movies. We have a low percentage. I don't think there is any black women with disabilities in movies. We are working on that. To be involved in Hollywood.  *I'm* going to Hollywood!

That's important. They have to see us, right? We don't have to look like you think? I'm an amputee. We have prothesis. Here is greater story. I have a sports car. So what? Driving to the parking space in Boston with disabled symbol, right? And what do people do? Penalties are given me because I'm parking in the handicap space. I have my placard. But I get penalized because, what? You know what they say? *You don't* ***look*** *disabled.* You don't look . . . I'm sorry. You don't look disabled.

We have to challenge that. There's not a book. What is disability supposed to look like? That's all of my strategies from both ends. Here are two things, this particular poem is in my book. I'm not going to tell you the page, you will not read my book. You will go right to it.

Here is how we define ourselves or don't have others define us. ***Never try to put me in a box, right?* Never try to constrain me or never try to put me in a box of your own making. Because I am worth so much more. So much more than you can force to fit a tiny space limited by your lack of understanding.**

Okay. Hmmm she says. Okay? Yeah. I will always feel that way when I wrote that poem. Don't put me in a box. Why do I have to be perceived to look like because of your limited vision? Not cool at all.

This is the last thing I will leave you with before we open for questions. Am I good on time? There we go. There we go. And I have it. Here it is. So here something. Check this out. I hope I can cover this. So here it goes. . ..

 I have one leg, you have two. I limp. You walk. I use a cane. You don't. She speaks with lips. He speaks with hands. He's gay, she's straight. They are transgendered. They are Muslim. He has Down Syndrome. She has autism. She is a little person. We have bipolar depression. He has a learning disability. She has spina bifida. They have traumatic brain injury. She is gifted and talented. She is hearing impaired. He has Tourette’s syndrome. They have visual impairments. She has cerebral palsy. They are deaf/blind. He is Cherokee or Eskimo. *They are all you.* Right? *Because this is us too and we are all enough.*

Thank you.

[applause]

>>[DONNA WALTON]: Thank you! I really want to open it up for questions. I hope that I touched on things that you may be able to relate to. All right. Excellent.

[SILENCE]. [DEBBIE FINK]: Dr. Walton will repeat the question into the mic?

>> [DONNA WALTON]: Yes, I will. Yes.

>> In New York? We talking about America? In New York? Okay. It's fear. And I think your comment is well taken. The question is about not *looking* disabled. Having an invisible disability and a person not following the law and not being able to accommodate the individual just on respect. I'm not going to turn it into a lecture on that particular point in particular and we can talk afterwards. I do want to share that a reason why a lot of this happens is out of fear. If you can ignore it and be fearful, you don't have to address it. The moment you got to be aware of it, you got to be tuned in to it. We want to talk about that. I would like to talk more about that with you. Thank you for that comment.

[DONNA]: Yes. Hi!

(Inaudible question)

>>[DONNA]: Yes. For fear of encountering you. So we talked about normalizing disability, if you will. I like to think of the word of *being authentic.* What's normal? Basically the comment being made is able *normalizing disability.* Talked about you don't have to show up looking like what someone thinks you should look like. The minute that you do, you challenge their fear. And they don't want to see themselves. They cannot imagine. Oh, wow, that can happen to me. Disability is only group that you can join at any age. Does not discriminate. So welcome!

Yes? Congratulations.

>> (inaudible question being asked) [away from the mic].

>>[DONNA]: That comment is very interesting. You want to take that?

>> I got a comment that was said. Very interesting comment. It was one of our deaf peers that just graduated high school. Congratulations. The comment was about looking at the person as being an inspiration actually. That's the way they interpret it. Persons look at the person in the wheelchair to be like that. [unintelligible]. We are not your inspiration. It's interesting because they want to live like you. And I think [unintelligible] comes from a faith of lack of maturity. I don't want to say it's not as informed as they should be about our lives and lifestyle and barriers we do have to encounter. I don't know. I may take it kind of flattering. To me, that's [cannot understand speaker].

I don't want to like being your inspiration. This is how you live every day. I don't know if they are saying inspired in that way? That's a really interesting, yeah, it was very awkward. That's a great way to put that. [unintelligible]. Yes.

>> [away from the mic].

>> [DONNA]: Okay. Thank you. Right. I can definitely relate to the story. Referring to the comment that they made about *medical treatment because you don't look disabled again*. That you are denied medical treatment. You don't have access to medical treatment. It's a real fact that women with disabilities, black women in particular are disproportionately affected in the medical system. The fact that you are not going to get the greatest medical care is very real.

Here is my experience when I became an amputee. And I would go to the gynecologist. Gynecologist ***never asked*** if I was sexually active. [unintelligible]. [very mumbled]. Woman with disability is not sexual. You are not deemed a woman. We are [very mumbled]. [away from the mic]. It's all kinds of messages.

I have not been denied. If you are not being asked if you’re sexually active and denied a service [away from the mic]. We have to make those judgments. [very mumbled]. It's frustrating. That's why the advocacy is so important. You know, showing up. And sometimes I know it comes off as if we have too many questions yeah.

>> [away from the mic].

>>[DONNA]: Because you are not [away from the mic]. I know. We can talk more about [away from the mic]. Yes?

>>[DONNA]: That's a good point. Advocate, ally. Talking to my friend and family member. And we talked. What can I do as an ally besides being a friend and supporting you? Great question. People went to a restaurant, not accessible, you can show up. We can help each other. You see something, say something. [unintelligible] in order for you to support us.

>> [DONNA]: Thank you. You're welcome. Thank you for showing up. I want to make one comment that speaks to both of your comments. Dawned on me what you said about the environment and being comfortable without disabilities. Think about it -- it would be universal design. If everything was [very mumbled] that everyone could have, you know, [unintelligible] access or easy access. We wouldn't have this discussion.

>> [away from the mic].

>> There’s many more of them -- that's an issue. The number of them and the number of people who have require accessible spaces. I hold my friends accountable all the time. Oh, my God, here she comes. They ask [unintelligible] actually, no. [away from the mic].

Anyway, thank you for your comment. So we have one more minute. So you are the lucky person. One minute and one question.

>> [away from the mic].

>> Absolutely.

>> [away from the mic].

[applause]

 Glad you made it.

>> [DONNA]: Thank you very much for showing up. I want to say thank you RespectAbility for having this forum to discuss this topic of women and girls in intersectionality. And sharing experience with how you are coming to terms with sharing your power and owning your disability and see that you have allies around you. You need to come over and join us with the divas. I will end my talk with you today and let you know that I appreciate your attention and I hope that I can be a value to you as we move throughout this day. Feel free to come and talk with me later on. And I will be here to sign your book.

>> At the end.

>> Thank you.

[applause]

>> [DEBBIE FINK]: Thank you to Donna! {Applause} Okay. Farewell to our webinar friends! Thank you for joining us!