***Disability Issues***

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*Providing individuals with disabilities, their families, friends, and advocates with relevant information to enhance their quality of life, health, and employability options.*

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**From the Editor:**

Dear Readers,

It’s spring, and I feel like a daffodil, finally emerging from a long sleep to feel the warm sun on my face. April is a time of rebirth when we celebrate the arrival of budding trees, chirping birds and baby bunnies. During April, we also celebrate Patriots’ Day, a time when we commemorate the first battles of the American Revolution that were fought in Lexington and Concord. This year is the 250th anniversary of these battles. As we mark this anniversary, we reflect on the courage of those early patriots who stood up for freedom and dared to imagine a new future. Patriots’ Day reminds us that change often begins with everyday people choosing to speak up, remain steadfast, and push forward – despite the odds.

From 1775 until today, Americans of all backgrounds, abilities, ages, and nationalities continue to fight for our freedoms. Our history is not a consistent march of progress but a complex story of advancements and setbacks. Each generation is called to carry forward the promise of liberty and justice for all.

The Patriots’ spirit of determination and perseverance lives on in the disability community. Whether we are advocating for accessibility, defending the right to live with dignity, or pushing for full inclusion in all aspects of society, we are part of that same long struggle for freedom that began centuries ago. We may not be lining up on battlefields, but we are raising our voices, organizing, and working every day to ensure that the freedoms promised long ago are truly available to all, even when the path isn’t easy.

Over the next 15 months, there will be many [250th anniversary celebrations](https://massachusetts250.org/). As we commemorate the past, let us also celebrate the persistence of those today who continue that fight in new ways. Let’s remember that progress takes time and effort – and that every voice, every action, and every life matters in the shaping of the more inclusive society we know is possible.

Marianne DiBlasi, Editor

*Marianne DiBlasi has been the editor of Disability Issues since 2011.  She was born with Spina Bifida and uses a combination of crutches and wheelchair to assist with mobility.  Her background is in sales and marketing, program management, and disability inclusion training.*

**Feeling Artwork from the Masters!**

**By Stephen Plummer**

An exhibit that places replicas of famous works of art at the fingertips of people who are blind or have low vision is coming to Massachusetts. This transformative tactile exhibition, entitled **Seven Art Movements**, will be on Perkins School for the Blind’s campus in Watertown from**April 7 to May 5,** and at the Worcester Public Library from **May 7 to June 4, 2025**.

Experiencing art masterpieces is usually a visual activity, and people are often asked to not touch the works. But, through a collaboration between the Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library, the Worcester Talking Book Library, and Tactile Images, a Chatham, New York company, blind and low vision individuals, their friends, and families, can experience some of the world’s most famous pieces of art that now include incredible levels of detail by touch.

**What is a "tactile image"?**

A tactile image harnesses the senses of touch, sound, and smell to help the blind and visually impaired community experience visual knowledge in a meaningful way.

Having worked extensively with the blind community, our patented technology allows the visually impaired to create accurate mental pictures of visual imagery without the need for a sighted companion.

~ [tactileimages.com](https://www.tactileimages.com/exhibitions/seven-art-movements)

“One could easily discern the features of the faces, garments, and backgrounds,” said Myra Ross, a visitor of the exhibit. “I left with a good general impression of the different portraits, able to visualize paintings I had heard about all my life, but never really understood.”

Through the works of masters like Leonardo da Vinci, Johannes Vermeer, and Vincent van Gogh, Seven Art Movements delves into the history and evolution of seven critical art movements across time: The Renaissance, the Baroque, Neo-classicism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Art Nouveau, and Expressionism. The exhibit seeks to explore each individual period through subject matter, craftsmanship, and style.

By utilizing three-dimensional, tactile technology, two-dimensional images are converted into three-dimensional representations that are digitally sculpted from high-density urethane material. Sensors are then embedded throughout the image and, when touched, provide additional audio information about the artwork. The resulting prints elevate every face, object, and other parts of the artwork, allowing people living with blindness or low vision a chance to touch and form mental images of everything from van Gogh’s distinctive brush strokes to the Girl with a Pearl Earring’s mysterious stare.

“We are pleased to be able to bring this immersive tactile experience to our visitors,” said Perkins Library director Kim Charlson. “This exhibition underscores Perkins’ commitment to accessibility and community involvement. By hosting this traveling tactile exhibition, we are creating a more inclusive environment for everyone, allowing all to explore, learn, and engage with art in new and exciting ways.”

To schedule your time slot to visit the exhibit on the Perkins campus before May 5, contact Perkins Library by calling 617-972-7240 or emailing Library@Perkins.org.

**The Emergence of Wholeness**

**by Marybeth Barker**

A world which isn’t designed for disability access can feel broken – or worse, it can make you feel as though *you’re* the one who is broken. For me, that sense of brokenness is a strong theme, both in my life and in my mosaic art.

Those of us living with a disability know that when something in our life breaks, we pick up the pieces and carry on. We navigate a world that is not designed with us in mind, yet we adapt, persist, and create beauty despite it all. Similarly, mosaic work is about taking what is broken and shaping it into something whole and meaningful.

When I was introduced to mosaic art by a friend several years ago, I was mesmerized by the idea of repurposing pieces of broken stained glass, ceramic dishes, and tiles to create objects and images. Right away, I was captivated by how healing I found the process of collecting, sorting, arranging, and rearranging the broken pieces. There are many forms of mosaic art, but the form I enjoy most involves using broken glass and ceramic pieces, pebbles, and bits of wood from nature. These small pieces – called [tesserae](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tessera) -- come in endless shapes, colors, textures, and origins. In addition to glass shards, even bottle caps or found objects like rusted nuts and bolts can be repurposed to create stunning mosaic images.

I’m not a professional artist, nor have I had formal training – but I was drawn to mosaic art because it felt like a powerful metaphor for life. Just as one incident, illness or success does not define or tell the entirety of one’s life story, so too mosaic art uses many different pieces, shapes and colors to make a whole image. In the same way that maneuvering through life using a wheelchair requires strategy and adaption, so too does manipulating and working with mosaic tesserae. Both have challenges or points of resistance and both require experimentation. Being open to experimentation in life, and in art, is key.

Often the imperfection in a piece of tesserae; a crack, a blemish, or stubborn bump, makes me resistant to including it. But when I do make use of it, I often discover that it’s the uniquely shaped piece which adds more depth and beauty to the finished image. Each individual fragment may retain, reflect, or even flaunt evidence of its past purpose. But the real magic lies in how the colors, textures, and shapes come together to visually tell a whole, beautiful, and entirely new story.

For better or worse, my disability gives me plenty of quiet time to sit and watch the birds and the shifting light on the pond where I live. It’s no surprise, then, that the images I create are inspired by nature – seasonal waterscapes, local birds, and the fish that inhabit the area. My favorite piece, a loon crafted from broken dishes and leftover floor tiles, proudly decorates my front door.

I enjoy the hands-on process of manipulating and shaping materials, such as, re-breaking a large piece of glass or nipping the sharp edges off a small one. There’s pleasure in filing down those edges until they’re smooth to the touch, safe enough to turn over in my fingers. One of the most satisfying parts is trying to control how a piece of glass breaks. Using a special tool, I score a line into the surface, then press along that line with another tool. If I’m lucky, the glass will split just as I planned.

But like life, the artistic process doesn’t always go the way I want it to. Some glass refuses to cooperate. No matter how deeply it’s scored, it may shatter along its own fault line, leaving behind unusable shards... or sometimes surprising me with a perfect bird wing, a leaf, or a delicately twisted twig. I’ve learned to listen to the glass, sometimes letting the mishaps guide me. Even on the best days, when the right colors and shapes seem to leap into my fingers, I know I’m not fully in control. Much like living with a chronic illness, at any moment, things can take an unexpected turn.

I can spend hours in “the zone,” picking up pieces and laying them down again and again. I place one piece next to another – this way and that – experimenting with shape, angle, and color to form the image I want to create. After hours of rearranging, cutting, snipping, and trimming, hopefully, the design I envisioned takes shape. Once I’m satisfied with the way it looks, including how the gaps between the pieces look, I carefully lift each piece, apply glue, and place it back down, adhering it to the base.

Grouting is the final, and important, step because when the gaps between the pieces are filled with grout, they will become an important feature of the finished image. Globs of grout are spread across the entire surface, seeping into the gaps between the tesserae. Once the excess is wiped away and the surface is polished, the bold lines of grout do something remarkable – they highlight not just the individual fragments, but also boldly call attention to the image as a whole. It’s a powerful reminder that, just like in life, wholeness can emerge – even after feeling broken.

Some forms of mosaic art require little to no cutting or special tools, making them accessible to beginners and those with physical limitations. There are plenty of YouTube tutorials, classes, and kits available for anyone interested in giving it a try.

Occasionally, the [New England Mosaic Society](https://www.newenglandmosaicsociety.com/) hosts community projects where the public is invited to help create a collaborative mosaic. These events are held in accessible locations and are a great way to learn. No experience is necessary, and all tools and materials are provided. Experienced artists are on hand to offer support and guidance, making it a welcoming and inclusive experience for all.

*Marybeth Barker, LCSW, MPH worked in public health research and as a social worker for over 30 years. She retired from Commonwealth Care Alliance in 2015. She is a member of the Concord Commission on Disability, a volunteer in the Special Care Nursery at Mass General Brigham, and an Airbnb super host. She enjoys swimming, adaptive cycling, and creating pond-inspired mosaic art.*

**Accessible Art with Centuries of Styles, Materials, and Artists for Inspiration**

**By Karen Stark and Emily Bhargava, New England Mosaic Society**

Thousands of years ago in ancient Greece, artists began using pebbles to create incredible pictorial mosaics, some of which survive to this day. As an art form, mosaics have been undergoing a renaissance as modern artists both continue ancient traditions and expand to new viewpoints, techniques, and materials. The New England Mosaic Society (NEMS) is celebrating its 10th anniversary and was founded to promote and accelerate this resurgence in an art form with centuries of history.

The Society provides opportunities for people with no prior mosaic experience to explore the medium together with experienced mosaic artists. We also foster opportunities for members to find out about classes, hear webinars from mosaicists around the world, gather for field trips to view mosaics, and engage in workshops to learn new techniques.

Since the pandemic, about once each year the New England Mosaic Society creates a community mosaic to be donated to a community organization. The receiving organizations have included The Family Table food pantry in Waltham, the Department of Children and Families in Burlington, the First Baptist Church in Jamaica Plain, and The Charles River Museum of Industry and Innovation in Waltham.

These projects have been a wonderful way to engage NEMS members from across the region by having them mail sections of a larger mosaic to the project coordinator. The public projects are also a way for community members, including many with no prior mosaic experience, to make their mark in a meaningful and public way. Additionally, these projects serve as an introduction to NEMS for people who might not know that our organization exists.

NEMS members range greatly in age, varying degrees of mobility, and time. We try to make our projects accessible to as many people as possible, first by creating projects that have a low barrier to entry in terms of experience and time commitment. Secondly, by holding community sessions in spaces that are accessible by wheelchair and by foot.

In the case of the tryptich mosaic that we created for the Charles River Museum, we developed a full-scale design for each panel and then divided the designs into sections. Each detailed section (animals, trees, plants and boats etc.) was sent to an interested NEMS member to mosaic independently. They mailed their creations back to the coordinator on a mesh backing. These pieces were adhered to the mosaic backer boards, and then community members came together at three tiling sessions to mosaic the simpler sections of sky, river and greenery.

While the sections made by novice community members were simpler, their pieces are just as important to the composition as the detailed elements, and we couldn’t have completed the project without the help of more than 100 volunteers. The murals are now on permanent display along the Riverway outside the museum in Waltham, MA.

Beyond what NEMS does to support accessibility, mosaic is inherently varied in terms of materials and approach, which makes it a wonderful art form for people with different hand strength and muscle control. Materials that are harder to cut can include stone and porcelain, and softer materials include terracotta and glass. Beads and stones don’t need to be cut at all. Mosaic is also extremely tactile, lending itself to those who are visually impaired. Tactile mosaics that leverage contrasting areas of texture stand up well to handling and are suitable for both creation and observation by touch.

Common to mosaic is the concept of *andamento*, or flow, that the artist uses to guide the eyes (or hands) of the observer through the artwork. Look closely at many mosaics and you will see that the arrangement of the small pieces is carefully planned and may follow the shape of objects or produce flowing lines. A different kind of flow also inspires many artists since the repetitive nature of creating a mosaic can be quite meditative.

If you would like to partake in a community project, please visit the [New England Mosaic Society website](http://www.newenglandmosaicsociety.com/) where we will announce our community projects and our exhibits for 2025. If you’ve become inspired by the art form, consider becoming a member and joining our webinars or finding a class from our teaching studios to begin your own mosaic journey!

*Karen Stark is currently president of the New England Mosaic Society. She is always glad to share her enthusiasm for mosaics as both an art form and a philosophy – ‘Beauty from Broken Things’.  For many years, Karen has also run art workshops and art shows for her church community, with an emphasis on including persons with different abilities.*

*Emily Bhargava is co-chair of the programming committee for the New England Mosaic Society; leading collaborative public mosaic projects and helping to craft an educational webinar series. Emily has been an artist for more than 20 years. Mosaic is her favorite medium, because the process is simple, but the results are stunning, and she loves turning discarded objects into new pieces of beauty.*

**Self-care During Challenging Times**

**by Sandy Alissa Novack**

*Does any of this sound familiar?* Your income hasn’t increased to keep pace with the rising costs of food or rent. You’re not sure whether college is the right path for your child, and you're unsure what that might mean for their future. The family car stopped working, and you had to dip into your emergency fund to cover the cost of repairs. You've postponed surgery more than once to take care of responsibilities at work and home, yet you haven’t had the chance to focus on your own health.

Life can feel overwhelming at times. Whether you're balancing work, family, health concerns, or unexpected setbacks, it’s easy to put your own needs at the bottom of the list. When we don’t make time for rest and recovery, stress can take a toll – physically and emotionally. And in a time when healthcare services are often stretched, it’s especially important to listen to what your body and mind are telling you.

Even small steps toward self-care can make a big difference. Here are a few gentle reminders that may help you take better care of yourself and the people around you.

**1. Set Aside “Me-Time” Every Day**

It might seem impossible to carve out time for yourself when your to-do list feels endless. Maybe you're juggling a job, have a pile of laundry to do, and a pet’s vet appointment. Still, setting aside even 30 minutes a day – whether it’s for a quiet walk in the park, reading a chapter of a good book, or doing something else that rejuvenates you can give you a much-needed moment of peace and perhaps joy. It’s not selfish; it’s essential.

**2. Set Aside “Us-Time”**

Relationships thrive when we make time for connection. Whether it's your partner, a parent, a neighbor, or a friend, take the time to do more than exchange passing pleasantries as you run out the door. Instead, check in and really listen or show up when they need a hand. When you’re there for someone else, you create shared moments of care and support that benefit both of you. It feels good to be present for someone who is important to you, or even a stranger who you have a brief interaction with.

**3. Find Reasons to Smile and Laugh**

Some of us have gotten used to covering our smiles with face masks so we may not be smiling as much, but it’s still important to find reasons to smile – at ourselves and with others. Go into the bathroom; yes now. Smile at the mirror. Does it feel unnatural or that your lips are too tight? It’s a sign that you may need to smile more. Try watching something funny – a comedy show, or a lighthearted movie. If you are lucky enough to have a friend who cracks great jokes, spend more time with them. Instead of stifling a belly laugh when you are out in public, let your hearty laugh ring out for all to hear – maybe others will join in. Smiling and laughter can lift your mood and reduce stress, so do it often.

**4. Try Something Different**

Routines are comforting, but a small change can offer a fresh perspective. If you always drive the same route to work or to the store, taking a new route can become an unexpected adventure. You may notice brilliant spring flowers blooming or see a bakery you’ve never tried so you stop in to treat yourself to a warm cookie that’s just out of the oven. Maybe you’ll see a Little League game and pull over to watch an inning. You don't have to spend a lot of money or time to add a little sparkle to your day.

**5. Learn Something New**

When life feels heavy, learning something new can add a bounce of excitement to your day. Maybe try your hand at quilting, plant tomatoes in a raised garden, or explore a new language – especially one that’s spoken by neighbors or people in your community. Being curious and learning new things doesn’t need to be formal to be enriching.

**6. Find Your Voice**

Do you want to feel heard? Of course you do. Sometimes, it helps to know that your thoughts and experiences matter. You might choose to write a letter to your local paper, speak at a community meeting or give testimony at the State House either in-person or virtually. It can be deeply meaningful to do something that contributes to positive change. Volunteer opportunities come in all shapes and sizes, from one-day events to ongoing commitments. You might help out at a hospital, support a health organization, or read with children at a local school.

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The world can feel uncertain, and challenges come in many forms. While self-care won’t solve every problem, it can help you build strength and resilience to better navigate whatever comes your way. Taking time for yourself and for others. It’s a powerful way to stay hopeful and engaged.

*Sandy Alissa Novack, MBA, LICSW, ACSW, CSW-G is on the Board of Directors of the Disability Policy Consortium and volunteers with the Boston Center for Independent Living.*

**How My Mind Helps Me Thrive**

**By Penelope Ann Shaw**

Twenty-four years ago, I became unexpectedly disabled. I was on life support and not expected to live – but I did.  It left me with physical limitations that prevent me from standing, walking, washing or dressing myself, cooking or cleaning. I also have no fine motor skills. For example, I need scissors to open an envelope, I use a power wheelchair, and I’m unable to drive a car.

Because of these changes, I am more aware of the many ways my mind benefits me. I notice how often I journey inward to a different world where I have incredible skills. In this world, I have the ability to plan, analyze, make decisions, remember, reflect, observe, organize, recognize people, identify patterns and make sense of them. It’s a place where I think creatively, synthesize, reason, communicate, evaluate information and experiences. All these abilities have practical applications, such as, they help me manage daily tasks, to focus my attention on something and ponder it. They help me to process different types of information, gaze inward at visual pictures, recognize sounds, distinguish colors, imagine new opportunities.

With my mind, I can process and interpret physical sensations like being hot, cold, in pain or fatigued as well as emotional sensations like being relaxed, pleased, concerned, frustrated, disappointed, determined.  I use all my senses; not only visual, but also hearing, touch and smell. When I’m under pressure or feeling overly taxed or frustrated, I often cope with my worrisome thoughts by escaping into my mind. There, I gain new perspectives by quieting my thoughts and having an inner conversation with myself. I emerge feeling revitalized and more optimistic.

With visual perception and spatial awareness, I scan the environment to judge the distance and speed of vehicles crossing streets in front of me. If necessary, I can then stop to be safe before proceeding. Thus, I can simultaneously focus on driving my wheelchair and checking out my surroundings.

I am a curious person. I read the latest local, national and international news to learn about the world I live in and try to make sense of what is going on in it. When reading, I am inspired by new ideas and insights that provide useful points I want to make in pieces I’m writing. When editing the piece, my mind also triggers other ideas. In addition to finding intellectual tasks interesting and illuminating, they are also intellectually stimulating and rewarding. Coming up with new ideas is like being on a journey and travelling to a new country. Something I can no longer do in person.

Decision-making skills are essential to my well-being. I rely on them to solve problems and navigate hardships, which helps me feel more peaceful. Thinking things through is like consulting with and being supported by another person—my inner voice of guidance. I often talk through an issue in my mind and then decide how best to approach it based on the strategies I develop and evaluate. Sometimes, this process even includes an imagined conversation with the person I hope to influence.

With my language capabilities of French and some Spanish, I’m able to communicate with staff from various countries who work in my facility. Additionally, my skills with English as a Second Language, helps me communicate in English with staff who have limited proficiency.

I often let my mind wander freely and engage in daydreaming. For example, during the winter, I dream of summer and being outside, enjoying the warm weather. In this way, I look to the future. When I’m in bed at night, I often go to a quiet inner world where my cognitive functions stimulate me, keep me busy, and mitigate boredom. This internal space is my office with no interrupting distractions. In bed, I often read books, using a pen and paper to write down thoughts for what I’m writing and to plan my days. Later, when I am asleep, my mind rests in preparation for the next day's work. Due to my paralysis, having something satisfying to do in bed is especially important because once I’m in bed, I cannot get up myself. I’ll be there until the aides get me up the next morning.

With my memory skills I store useful information and later retrieve what I need. With short-term memory, I can remember the name of a person I just met, a task I must complete or something I need to buy.  With long-term memory, I can recall events from long ago, which I think I'd forgotten. I can reflect on my personal history, replay events and reminisce about the passage of time by calling up both people and experiences. Reflections can also be purposeful, such as, knowing people's names, or recalling information I’ve read and studied. All my memories are internally organized for easy access. It is like having a personal library where everything has been catalogued. I am amazed at how large the storage area is!

Cognitive skills are especially useful when living in a nursing home. To get my care done right, I often need to figure out how to work with nursing assistants who have different personalities and skills. I also need to know how to inform, motivate and persuade the management of my facility to address the problems I encounter. With these skills, I survive institutional life. I would prefer home and community-based services, but I do not quality for these since I’m a 2-person assist and require 24-hour access to care.

Overall, I am amazed by my mind. I’m in awe of the power of thought and all it offers me. Because of it, I feel stronger, more confident, and uplifted. Most importantly, through the workings of my mind, I transcend my limitations. My cognitive abilities, interior journeys, and inner life liberate me from the constraints of my disability. Providing me with a positive state of mind and a full life each day – something for which I am appreciative of.

In closing, I often ask myself – who could have predicted that when I was on life support and not expected to survive, I would one day thrive and live a full life thanks to my mind, my consciousness, my cognitive strengths and abilities that I benefit from every day?

*Penelope Ann Shaw, Ph.D., has a complex physical disability from Guillain-Barre Syndrome. She is a state and national advocate who uses her personal experiences to push for public policies that will improve the lives of children and adults with all types of disabilities. In Spring 2020, she was appointed as a member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force's Coronavirus Commission on Safety and Quality in Nursing Homes.*

**LOVE & INTIMACY CORNER**

**Mammograms and Accessibility**

**by Ms. Love**

I remember when my mother stopped having mammograms. It was when she needed to use a wheelchair after her stroke. One day, I asked her about keeping up with her preventative tests and she told me that because she was in a wheelchair she couldn't have a mammogram anymore. That always bothered me. Although it has been decades since she died, mammograms and accessibility have a special meaning for me.

As for your Ms. Love, due to a variety of physical disabilities and chronic health issues, I’ve had my own challenges getting a mammogram. As each year passes, I leave my mammogram appointment wondering how much longer my body can handle this. Then I think of my mother, and I schedule my next appointment; almost holding my breath anticipating that it could be my last year of having this life-saving x-ray.

When I first began having mammograms, I had the traditional test – standing up with arms outstretched around part of the equipment. I even loved one of the community settings where I went at that time. One year all the medical providers were costumed to the hilt for Halloween. I was fascinated with their creative costumes and make-up. My fascination distracted me from the painful breast compression that I always experience during this test. For years afterward, I would try to schedule my mammogram on Halloween to see how else they dolled up. Alas, it never worked out to have an appointment on Halloween at that office.

As my vestibular issues progressed, changing clothes began to affect my balance. I asked if someone could check on me in the dressing room to make sure I was okay, and they willingly agreed. Similarly, I began to need assistance staying steady during the mammogram itself.

At one of my annual visits, a technician told me I could have the test while sitting in chair. I was so relieved. For many years, I was able to have mammograms this way – until the day came when that changed. Similar to my mother, I experienced a life-changing event and I could no longer have mammograms in a community setting. I asked the staff if there were any alternatives or if I would no longer be able to have the test. They recommended scheduling future mammograms at the hospital, where they have more flexibility to accommodate various needs.

About ten years ago, I had a mammogram in the radiology department of my hospital. I explained my disability and health issues to the technician, and she assured me that they could help make the experience more accessible. What a relief!

I was introduced to the radiologist, who listened attentively to my questions. Together with two technicians, we had a brief but reassuring conversation. They explained that while mammography equipment is large, heavy, and doesn’t bend, they do their best to accommodate patients like me and make the procedure as accessible as possible.

I asked what would happen if I could no longer hold my arms up, or if my health conditions continued to progress, making it even more difficult to have a mammogram.

They suggested scheduling future appointments with the mammographer who specializes in making the procedure more accessible. The radiologist also mentioned that some patients, instead of having a traditional mammogram, lie on an MRI table with their arms raised above their heads for an alternative imaging test. However, she made it clear that the gold standard for breast screening remains the mammogram.

Unfortunately, I had to explain that raising my arms like that for an MRI would not be possible for me. Still, the most important takeaway I held onto was, I had options. I had access to technicians who are trained in accessibility, and while the MRI setup may not be suitable for me, it could be the right solution for someone else. Options give us a sense of possibility – and that can make all the difference.

Since then, I’ve gone for annual mammograms at the hospital. I schedule the appointment with a mammogram manager who contorts herself to get under both me and the machine, positioning my legs and arms just right while I stand at the mammogram equipment. We keep my rollator walker close by, with the brakes on, and have a chair nearby so I can sit down and rest my arms, legs, and the rest of me between views, if needed.

One year, this kind and dedicated mammogram manager slipped on the ice and needed knee surgery. But after physical therapy and returning to work, she still got down under the machine beside me, positioning my body as carefully and precisely as ever, ensuring the best possible outcome for my breast screening.

The hospital’s radiology department has one accessible dressing that is large enough for my walker to move in and out comfortably. It also has a bench so I can change in and out of a hospital gown without overwhelming my vestibular system.

In recent years, the same mammogram manager has me stay seated in the mammogram room, still in my gown, while she checks if the radiologist is available to review the images right away. That way, I can avoid the possibility of having to return for additional views. Yes, this often means that patients who arrived after me are in and out before I am because making the mammogram process more accessible takes extra time. However, the person assisting me has never once made me feel that we needed to rush.

I still leave each mammogram wondering how many more years I’ll be able to manage the test. Will there come a time when they tell me my body simply can’t be positioned well enough for it to matter? Even so, I think of my mother, and I know she would want me to hang in there and keep going – for as long as I can – to these now much more accessible mammogram appointments.

Is this approach right for you? Maybe not. But it’s worth asking your local mammogram site what options they might have. There may be one that will work for you. Until someone designs truly disability-friendly mammogram equipment (or medical equipment in general), the best advice I can give is to ask about options. Before you book the appointment, ask what accommodations are available for your needs. Sometimes, having options is the first step toward making something feel possible.

*The Love and Intimacy Corner welcomes questions and requests for topic areas from readers. Please send all comments, questions, and suggestions to Ms. Love at* *DI.LoveandIntimacy@gmail.com* *Questions chosen to be featured in the Ms. Love column will appear under a pseudonym to protect privacy and may be edited.*

**INFORMATION BRIEFS**

**ArtsBoston All Access Calendar**

**Patrons with disabilities will find a more barrier-free path to cultural activities with the launch of a vital and groundbreaking accessible arts calendar**

[ArtsBoston](https://www.artsboston.org/), the region’s leading nonprofit arts service and marketing organization, announces the launch of [ArtsBoston All Access Calendar](https://calendar.artsboston.org/), a comprehensive accessibility upgrade to its widely used online arts and ticketing calendar. The long history of arts patrons with disabilities seeking reliable resources, a recent regional report about access challenges for patrons and organizations, and a series of conversations with leading accessibility advocates prompted ArtsBoston to jump into action. The project is in collaboration with accessibility consultants [Think Outside the Vox](https://thinkoutsidethevox.org/).

The ArtsBoston All Access Calendar was created in direct response to feedback from disability advocates and patrons with disabilities who face barriers to crucial information about arts and culture events. **To learn more about this project, read the** [press release](https://www.artsboston.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/AB-ALL-ACCESS-CALENDAR-RELEASE-DEC-2024-1.pdf)**.**

*Feedback on the accessibility of the ArtsBoston All Access Calendar is welcome. Please let ArtsBoston know if you encounter any accessibility barriers or what you like about the accessibility features by filling out a* [*brief survey*](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc60bpvizKuCu2j0JhaUccP_w8ai1laEFgUlp39iaZrC8toRQ/viewform) *or email* *nates@artsboston.org**. Messages will be addressed within one business day.*

**Discovery Museum and Discovery Woods in Acton**

**A place to engage in indoor and outdoor play that is wheelchair accessible and developed based on Universal Design principles**

When families visit the [Discovery Museum](https://www.discoveryacton.org/), they can engage in both indoor and outdoor play. [Inside](https://www.discoveryacton.org/visit/exhibits#indoors), there are sound, simple machine, water, and air play galleries. [Outside](https://www.discoveryacton.org/visit/exhibits#outdoors), there are plenty of ways for kids to get active, including a stroller and wheelchair-accessible [Discovery Treehouse](https://www.discoveryacton.org/exhibits/discovery-treehouse). Visitors can prepare for their visit by reviewing the [Exhibits](https://www.discoveryacton.org/node/22) section and the [Accessibility](https://www.discoveryacton.org/visit/accessibility) page. To see and learn more, view this [Go Out and Play](https://www.wcvb.com/article/go-out-and-play/8354168) segment, featuring a visit to the treehouse, that aired on Chronicle.

The [Especially for Me](https://www.discoveryacton.org/visit/especially-me) program series offers dedicated hours and free admission for families with disabilities. During these events, we offer accommodations that increase access to exhibits and provide an opportunity for families to network with one another in an understanding, ADA-compliant environment.

While the event titles indicate the focus for certain program accommodations, any family that would benefit from a sensory friendly visit is welcome at any time. *A medical diagnosis is not required.* All events are free but require pre-registration online.

Our 2025 Especially for Me events include:

* Autism-Friendly Evening
* Evening for Deaf, Blind, or DeafBlind
* Inclusive Afternoon
* Inclusive Evening
* Inclusive Evening for Visitors 18+
* Morning for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Visitors

Great play is what every kid needs and every kid deserves. Come out and play at Discovery Museum!