



Disability History and Awareness Month 2023

Matthew Walzer

A large part of what it means to experience disability is, unfortunately, experiencing inaccessibility. Inaccessibility can mean many things for people with different disabilities; for some, it can mean a lack of automatic door buttons, a lack of wheelchair access, poor sidewalk ramps, etc. When people with disabilities have to grapple with accessibility barriers, it limits them from being able to participate in life fully – disability is not the issue; the environment disabled people navigate is.



For Matthew Walzer, shoes were inaccessible to him. Walzer has Cerebral Palsy with Spastic Diplegia, which impacts an individual's balance, coordination, and muscle tone (making it hard to utilize the body's full range of motion, among other symptoms). Feeling frustrated that he couldn't find shoes that were both accessible and practical, Walzer wrote an open letter to Nike that went viral, asking the company to develop shoes that would work better for people with disabilities. Over the course of 3 years, Nike worked with Walzer to create a line of more physically accessible shoes, which have since been released to the public.

Because of Walzer's efforts, people with many types of disabilities now have easier access to accessible footwear. Walzer believes that striving for greater accessibility in every aspect of life is essential to the well-being of people with disabilities because when they encounter barriers to access, it strips them of their independence and autonomy.

Profiles by Andrew Caruana, Policy and Research Intern, Office of Senator Sara Gelser Blouin

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