WHAT IS AN INVISIBLE DISABILITY?

A person is considered to have a disability if they have difficulty performing certain functions (seeing, hearing, talking, walking, climbing stairs and lifting and carrying) or activities of daily living, or has difficulty with certain social roles (doing schoolwork, working at a job, taking care of a home, etc.)

People often think the term “disability” refers only to people using a wheelchair, walker or mobility cane. On the contrary, 74% of Americans who live with a severe disability do not use such devices. Therefore, a disability cannot be determined solely on whether or not a person uses an assistive device or equipment that you can readily “see.” The disability may be “invisible” to others.

The term “invisible disabilities” refers to symptoms such as debilitating pain, fatigue, dizziness, cognitive dysfunctions, brain injuries, learning differences and mental health disorders, as well as hearing and vision impairments. These are not always obvious to the onlooker, but may limit daily activities, range from mild challenges to severe limitations, and vary from person to person.
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES consist of the world’s largest minority group, as well as the only group that any of us can become a part of at any time.

24% of adults have a disability today. Disabilities impact all of us!

1 in 4 people experience some disability

74% of people who live with a severe disability do not use an assistive device making their disability “invisible.”

* Data gathered from the CDC
Mission

The Invisible Disabilities® Association (IDA) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. IDA is about believing. We believe you! The frequently invisible nature of illness and pain may lead to disbelief about that illness or pain by those surrounding the person who lives with invisible disabilities. This disbelief can lead to misunderstandings, rejection by friends, family and health care providers. It may also lead to accusations of laziness or faking an illness. We are passionate about providing awareness that invisible illness, pain and disabilities are very real! Our mission is to encourage, educate and connect people and organizations touched by illness, pain and disability around the globe. Envision with us, a world where people living with illness, pain and disability will be Invisible No More®.
Colorado Passes Disability ID Symbol

JUNE 30, 2021 - DENVER, COLORADO

IDA founder, Wayne Connell, had a dream in 2010 for the IDA logo to become the international symbol for disability. In 2017, Alaska was the first state to adopt legislation to use the logo as a voluntary symbol for invisible disabilities. In 2019, IDA intern Rebecca Zickerman, a high school senior in Littleton, Colorado, took off with the idea and initiated legislation in Colorado. The legislation, HB21-1014, provides people living with invisible disabilities the voluntary option to have a designated Disability ID Symbol printed on their government-issued IDs. In June of 2021, Colorado Governor Jared Polis signed HB21-1014 into law. Similar bills have also passed in Utah, Ohio, Georgia and Wisconsin, with other like New York, Pennsylvania and Alabama in process. One day, our hope is that every state will have this program.

The Colorado law also provides for a database that can only be accessed by Law Enforcement, allowing parents and caregivers to enter information that gives insight about vehicle passengers that have disabilities that will help officers know what to expect when they approach the car. IDA is also partnering with outside agencies for developing new disability training for Law Enforcement so that possible tense interactions can be de-escalated before they happen for people with disabilities. Some 40 agencies, ranging from the Anti-Defamation League to Arc Thrift and Natural Grocers, supported IDA’s efforts to get the bill passed.

IDA Logo chosen as the Disability Symbol for Government IDs

As the law in Colorado was passed, it also included the use of the IDA “i” logo as the “official” symbol that will represent people living with invisible disabilities in Colorado. The IDA symbol is also being used in other countries and states as the designated symbol for people living with invisible disabilities. Our symbol is different from the wheelchair icon, which only represents people that need access, not for everyone dealing with the need for accommodations because of invisible disabilities. One of the purposes for the Disability ID Symbol is to provide governments with a licensed, protected, nationally recognized disability symbol offered for free in partnership with IDA.

I am more relaxed when I am wearing my Disability ID Card in public because I know others can help me if needed.

-Aliyah*, who lives with MS

Making invisible disabilities Invisible No More!

During the height of the COVID pandemic, all of our legislative efforts got put on hold. But we were hearing from our constituencies the need for some type of ID card. So we launched the grass-roots efforts with this ID card and it is having a huge impact all over the globe. We are also creating business disability training so we help restaurants and other merchants become “National Disability ID Friendly” which can be identified by a door sticker.

When you see this ID card, please ask how you can help.

Order online at: invisibledisabilities.org
HISTORY OF IDA

The Invisible Disabilities® Association began with just two people: Sherri and Wayne Connell. Sherri, a vibrant, accomplished young woman learning to live with multiple illnesses, and Wayne, a devoted husband who simply wanted to help others understand his wife’s struggle with the tasks of everyday living. Frustrated from not being believed about the disabilities she battled every day, Sherri exclaimed one day, “I know what I should call this! I have an ‘invisible disability!’” The phrase soon became a reality and a worldwide term. Neither of them realized how strongly their story would resonate with others, and so the journey began. The Invisible Disabilities Advocate® was born in 1996 and in 2004, the Invisible Disabilities® Association became an IRS approved 501(c)3 non-for-profit corporation.

Today, the organization Sherri and Wayne founded has become a growing non-profit dedicated to supporting those touched by illness, pain and disability across the globe. IDA’s mission is to encourage, educate and connect. Since 1997, the year before Google went online, IDA’s website, online social networks and support communities have helped to provide resources and connect more than six and a half million people worldwide, with information, encouragement and support.

Despite the economic downturn due to COVID in 2020, IDA continues to provide helpful resources to caregivers and care receivers. IDA is living out their 2019-2022 Strategic Plan with state and federal legislations under way along with lots of other programming and outreach resources that serve to help people living with invisible disabilities every single day. IDA depends entirely on charitable donations to fund its programming and outreach efforts. We continue to grow and we need your support to expand our mission and continue to help people touched by illness, pain and disability.

GIVING OPPORTUNITIES

Donations can be given online through our website at www.invisibledisabilities.org or checks can be made out to “Invisible Disabilities Association” and sent to PO Box 4067, Parker, CO 80134, online at www.giveida.org or you can Text 'GIVEIDA' to 44321.

Sponsorships are available for the IDA Annual Gala, Podcasts and other social and digital media programming. Call or email us to find how you can be involved!

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

There are lots of ways to “volunteer” with IDA. We have numerous pages across the social media spectrum. We encourage you to join in the conversations, share your invisible disability story with others, create new friendships, provide connection to support groups and inform each other about upcoming awareness events.

IDA AMBASSADORS

One of the most popular and effective ways for volunteering is becoming an IDA Ambassador. IDA Ambassadors include a wide variety of personality types, from pageant participants and athletes, to students and aficionados. Whether talking about invisible disabilities through your platform or forming a local groups to support others, IDA has various Ambassador resources that will help you get started and continue to be effective in having conversations and helping people “believe” the accommodations and empathy necessary to help people living with invisible disabilities.

Calendar

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month
2022 Invisible Disabilities Week is the 3rd week in October 16-22, 2022
2022 IDA Gala will be on Saturday, October 22, 2022 presented virtually online
The Invisible Heroes® is a campaign of the Invisible Disabilities® Association. An Invisible Hero is a Veteran or first responder such as a Firefighter, EMT or Police Officer who is battling invisible wounds such as PTSD, TBI, injuries and/or other invisible disabilities or someone who is actively supporting them.

By supporting the Invisible Disabilities® Association (IDA) with your donation, your gift will allow IDA to continue to be a voice for all people living daily with illness, pain and disability including veterans and first responders. It will allow us to bring to light the need for visibility to the invisible struggles of millions of people. IDA shares their voices and stories of triumph and tragedy with the world. IDA strives to encourage, educate and connect friends, family, co-workers, medical personnel and businesses with articles, publications, resources, radio, television, podcasts, seminars and more. You can provide much needed support for IDA today at www.giveida.org or Text ‘GIVEIDA’ to 44321. We are tremendously grateful for your generosity.
Thank you to all of our partners and sponsors throughout 2021. We have seen many other non-profits of our size disappear and close down because of the financial struggles that resulted from the pandemic and shutdowns. We cannot thank you enough for continuing to partner with us during these difficult times for everyone. Your ongoing financial and media outreach support is critical for communicating our mission in advocating for people living with invisible disabilities. You are all amazing and we could not do this without you! We greatly appreciate our relationship with you. We are excited for the future and our continuing to work together with you for advancing IDA’s work.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!
94% of donor funding supports programming, awareness and legislative efforts.

6% for Business and Financial Admin.

2021 INCOME: $101,610.73

- Contributions
  - Individual: $61,373.55
  - Corporate: $23,211.20
- Product Sales: $1,818.98
- SBA PPP Grant: $15,207.00
Where does the money go?*

- **National Disability ID Legislation and Program Development** 52%
- **Technology Development/Intellectual Property** 22%
- **Online Programming/Virtual Events** 7%
- **Insurance** 5%
- **Business Admin.** 4%
- **Legal Services** 4%
- **Marketing/Fundraising/Communications** 4%
- **Financial Admin.** 2.6%
- **Professional Development/Education** 0.4%

2021 EXPENSES...........................................................................................................$ 93,611.19*

- National Disability ID, Legislation, Program Dev. 52%........... $ 50,605.64
- Technology Development/Intellectual Property 22%.............. $ 21,416.94
- Online Programming/Virtual Events 7%..................................... $ 6,819.96
- Insurance 5%.......................................................... $ 4,479.58
- Business Admin. 4%.................................................. $ 3,647.77
- Legal Services 4%..................................................... $ 3,627.01
- Marketing/Fundraising/Communications 4%......................... $ 3,618.82
- Financial Admin. 2.6%............................................... $ 2,391.39
- Professional Development/Education 0.4%.......................... $ 644.00

*Based on IDA 2021 accounting.
The New Normal – UGH!

“Despite the almost miraculous development of effective vaccines against COVID-19 in 2020, the virus continued to spread and mutate throughout the last year, with much of the blame placed on a lack of effective global collaboration as a key reason for the prolonged pandemic.”

- United Nations News, December 27, 2021

As a father, I had the habit of asking at the dinner table each night what my kids’ highs and lows were for that day. It was a great way to catch up and stay tuned to what was happening in their lives as well as guide them in their steps. The highs and lows of 2021 caused a confusing and tough year as COVID continued to plague people around the globe. It had a much more devastating effect on our people living with invisible disabilities. Vaccinations gave us hope for a cure, but also had debilitating side effects for some, polarizing our population into shaming people for not wearing masks and mistreating people for not getting vaccinated without the slightest movement toward understanding the “why” behind it. Sadly, it is another example of “not being believed.”

If there was a “high” of the pandemic, it was the greater understanding that came about because of what “healthy” people were experiencing due to lockdowns, i.e., not being able to go out of the house whenever they wanted to. For the first time, others could identify what people living with certain invisible disabilities feel and experience much of their lives.

Another “high” was that the pandemic also created a recognition of alternative work environments advocating for what we’ve been saying all along - people with disabilities can receive accommodations that make it possible to work from home much more than previously thought or even considered.

As my title suggests, “Ugh,” this was the “new normal” for some people, but for those living with IDs, it was a more of the same, only worse. There is no easy road for people living with invisible disabilities, or any disability for that matter. And that is why we exist, to help raise awareness, to engage at a level of understanding and accommodations, creating legislation and laws and other options for helping any way we can here through IDA’s work.
I am proud of our team and hard work. In Colorado, we got two majors bills passed into law in 2021; the Disability ID Symbol and the Disability Training for First Responders, both of which IDA had a major role in getting these across the finish line. But our work has only started. Everyone seemed to be keeping an eye on Colorado to see how it would go, and then once the laws passed, people, representatives and agencies got in touch with us to help them initiate this legislation in their state. In Ohio, they are introducing a new disability placard for parking identification. It is orange with the Disability ID Symbol on it so that law enforcement and others can tell that the person in the car has an invisible disability, i.e., they might just walk out of their car from the disability parking spot - and that’s OKAY!!

Well, what are the other highs and lows for IDA in 2021? Highs? We have made some incredible headway, breaking major barriers in 2021. I really did focus a lot on interacting with government agencies and getting our legislation to a place whereby it would have great impact on the daily lives of those we serve.

So, what is the low? What is my biggest concern? Honestly? Money. It takes funding to do what we do, and we’ve been getting a whole lot done with a very little. It is time for us to grow into an organization that matches our reputation and perceived size. When I am on the phone or in meetings with other groups, it is always assumed that IDA is this behemoth, overseeing the world’s concerns for people living with invisible disabilities with unlimited resources and power. That’s just not the truth. I have been the only full-time employee, doing most of the work on the front lines by myself since 2018. Wayne works hard supporting what I do, managing the backend systems, front facing services, and events and is an integral part of the IDA big-picture workflow as well. And the IDA Board is an amazing group of leaders for which I am very thankful. We have a few volunteer positions that we would like to roll into paid positions, but with the current cashflow (or lack thereof), we just can’t do it yet. We need your help financially and with critical connections. If you know any representatives for your state, please connect with me so I can get in front of them to help share how we can help get legislation in place. We’re all in this together!

Sincerely,

Jess Stainbrook, Executive Director
Wayne Connell - Founder and Board Chair
CEO, Invisible Disabilities® Association
Senior Manager, DISH Network

Margaret Aranda MD PhD - Board Vice-Chair
Physician, Author, and Inspirational Speaker at Aranda MD Enterprises

Mike Brewer - Board Treasurer
CEO, Allurdata-Gravatop Energy Resources

Jim Calanni JD MBA - Board Secretary
Director, Stella Technology

Dr. Lisa Holt - Board Member
Chief Science Officer, FReMedica

Steve Shapiro Esq - Board Member
Attorney/Partner, Ogborn Mihm LLP

Sue Stevenson B.ED, FCIPD, PCC, RPCC - Board Member
CEO/Founder, Lifted Fog LLC
Global Executive Coach, Brain-Based Facilitator, and Consultant

Joe Womack - Board Member
CEO, Fireplace Warehouse ETC

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Kaycee Bills PhD MSW LSW - Director of I.D.E.A.S.
Darian Wulf-Killian - Director of Communications