

## **"Inclusive Children's Books; Promoting Self Confidence, Acceptance, and Kindness"**

**Hillary Sussman, Author**

**International Disability Rights Affirmation Conference 2022**

**October 28**

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[2022/10/28 06:57] Carolyn Carillon: Hello everyone.

Today's presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time.

Some speakers may be using a text teleprompter tool for some or all of their presentation.

Transcriptionists will fill in any gaps and support the Question & Answer section at the end.

A little explanation about this service.

Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.

Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.

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Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.

The transcriptionists are:

Elektra Panthar

Carolyn Carillon

The speakers will be identified by initials as they speak.

The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speakers:

HS: Hillary Sussman

<<transcription begins>>

[2022/10/28 07:00] Gentle Heron: Welcome everyone to Virtual Ability's 2022 International Disability Rights Affirmation Conference, which we also often abbreviate to IDRAC.

The conference theme this year is "Access to Justice." That's a topic that can be interpreted in many ways, and you will see that our presenters are looking at access and justice from a variation of perspectives.

This reminds me of one of my favorite quotes by Helen Keller:

"Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained."

Let's think about that shared sense of responsibility as we listen to today's speakers.

I do want to remind our audience that our presenters are new to Second Life, so let's pay attention while they present and save our questions for the Q&A at the end.

Please click on the light blue sign to the left of the stage to get additional information about Virtual Ability.

Also in that sign is a notecard of SLURLs to poster sets on Healthinfo Island that are about a variety of Disability Justice and other topics for the rest of October.

Now let me invite Zzri to introduce our first guest presenter.

[2022/10/28 07:02] Zzri (IDRAC 2022 Introducer): Greetings, everyone, and welcome to Virtual Ability's annual IDRAC conference!

I am Zzri Avian and, today, I have been in SL for exactly 13 years.

I enjoy exploring the various worlds and communities of SL.

I also volunteer as an information assistant for the Virtual Worlds Education Consortium (VWEC).

In RL, I am an IT Quality Assurance analyst from Penang, Malaysia.

Today, I would like to introduce Hillary Sussman.

She has been a physical therapist for 23 years, and often works with children who lack self-confidence due to their disabilities.

She also writes children's books to help children deal with bullying and feeling different.

Her talk for today is titled: "Inclusive Children's Books; Promoting Self Confidence, Acceptance, and Kindness".

Having the knowledge on how to access justice is an important aspect of modern society.

I do hope that through storytelling and books, we would be able to share this important knowledge with younger generations.

Audience, please hold your questions and comments to the end, so as not to interrupt the presentation's timing.

Welcome, Hillary Sussman! The floor is yours.

\*\*\* End \*\*\*

[2022/10/28 07:04] Carolyn Carillon: HS: Thank you Zzri

Hello everybody

My name is Hillary Sussman

I've been a physical therapist for 24 years

I'm now a children's' author

I'm inspired by my work

and my own dog

Today I want to talk about how children's' book can help children gain confidence

They can help students see themselves

And plant the seeds for self-acceptance

They promote awareness, inclusion, kindness and acceptance of difference

Only 3.4% of children's' literature has content about disability

Inclusive books can open communication

They're non-threatening

I have activities on my web site that are free

They can reinforce the message from the books

I thought it'd be nice to read both of my books

I'll make comments as we go

About how the books can be helpful

My first book came out last year

It's called Roxy and Maliboo: It's Okay to Be Different

[HS reads the book ... the words are on the slides]

In the first slide, I talk about how Roxie looks sad

Dogs don't like to go to the vet in the same way children don't like to go to the doctor

[reads]

Here we talk about the fact that she lost a leg and feels uncomfortable  
It's new and scary

[reads]

*Since my trip to the "scary place,"  
I have not done a lot,  
Most of the time, I lie on the  
couch, in my favorite spot.  
I dream of the park, where I meet  
my friends, able to roam free,  
My parents worry I'll get hurt, so  
they stay at home with me.*

*One day I heard my mom on the  
phone, speaking to the vet.  
She told her it was safe for me to play  
outside; this I'll never forget.  
So, I'm here to share an adventure  
from one amazing day,  
Looking back, it changed my life,  
and for now that's all I'll say.*

*Soon I heard my favorite words,  
the ones I longed to hear,  
"Roxy, want to take a ride?" asked  
my mom, so loud and clear.  
I got so excited, hearing my  
favorite garage door sound,*

*Were we driving to a store?  
No, to a park we were bound!*

*On this unforgettable day, one  
I'm so happy to share,  
I met my friend Maliboo, and  
we became an inseparable pair.  
I first saw him in the distance,  
alone in the dirt by the fence,  
He was a mix of brown and white like me, but  
there was something wrong I could sense.*

Maliboo looks sad but we're not sure why.

*Maliboo looked up at me, then he  
put his head right down,  
At first I wondered why he was sad,  
and then I looked around.  
Dogs of all shapes and sizes were  
Running and playing a game,*

*Maliboo was sitting alone in the dirt. I think he felt ashamed.*

*Maliboo was different; he looked older with big green eyes, I was not sure what kind of dog he was, but he was about my size. There is one thing I want to tell you, one could see from far and near, Maliboo was not like other dogs because he was missing one ear.*

*When I got the nerve to talk to him, there was something I had to say, I looked at him and began to speak; he did not look away. Hello, hello, hello, my name is Roxy Roo! I'd like to be your friend and play; does that sound fun to you?*

I ask kids if they think Maliboo wants to play with Roxie  
Younger kids say yes  
Older kids sometimes say that kids may not want to play  
It's interesting to see the difference in perspective as children get older

*"We both look different, and That is nothing to fear! One of us has three legs, and the other has one ear."*

*Maliboo just stared back at me as I waited for his reply, He perked right up, shook his coat and said, "I think I'm ready to try!"*

*And can you guess what happened that day at the park? The other dogs joined, and we played and played till dark. We ran in the dirt and grass, around and around the loop, All of us having so much fun, together in a group.*

Here I say to the children  
Do you think the other children cared that one dog was missing a leg and the other was missing a leg?  
And we talk about just because you're different, you can still be friends

*No one judged our differences, that was my first hunch, Even with what made us unique, we were still part of the bunch.*

*It's okay; it's okay, it's okay, being*

*different is not something bad.  
It's often what makes you special.  
It's not a reason to be sad!*

So how can this book help your child?

It creates empathy

You can ask how does Roxie feel?

Do you ever feel that way?

It opens a dialog about living with difference

It teaches kindness

and inclusion

For each of my books, I have 3 printable activities on my website

So after children read the books, teachers and parents can continue to reinforce the messages of the book

My favourite is "What makes you awesome?"

You can talk with children about what makes them unique

Now I'm going to switch gears and talk about what happens in public

I don't have a disability

I'm a physical therapist and advocate

But this is what I've found after talking with parents

How can you handle public situations?

It is your CHOICE, not your RESPONSIBILITY to educate others.

If you see another child staring, and perhaps the other parent is saying, "shhhh don't stare",

It may be a good opportunity to share you or your child's story with both of them, teach them that it is okay to ask, and share.

When kids enter a new environment

Like starting a new school

It's difficult because they feel like they might not fit in

They might not have confidence

They might be scared to make new friends

Kids may stare at them or whisper

They're afraid they'll be rejected

That leads me to my second book

Called Roxy and Tully: Words Matter

I'll read it now

*Hi, my name is Roxy Roo. My new school is about to begin.*

*I'm feeling very nervous and worried I won't fit in.*

*My mom says, "Don't worry, wearing a prosthesis is okay." Tell that to all the others, as they laugh and walk away.*

I ask, does anyone know what a prosthesis is

Roxy is nervous to go to a new school because she has a visible difference

*When the first day came, I hid inside my crate,  
But my parents made me get on the bus. "Roxy,  
you'll be late!" I acted brave walking to class,*

*my snout held in the air. I saw some chickens  
stare and cluck; I tried hard not to care.*

This is where I talk about if someone has ever whispered about you.

*That day in math I answered correctly,  
"What is two plus two?"  
I couldn't believe it when someone  
oinked, "Great job, Roxy Roo."  
I looked behind my desk to see who'd been so kind.  
It was a friendly pig dressed in purple,  
her name was Clementine.*

This is where I talk about compliments.

*Then she oinked, "I like your leg Roxy; it's  
really cool." "Thanks, it's called a blade, I was  
afraid to wear it to school." "Don't worry Roxy,"  
she oinked. "Come eat lunch with us."  
I was so happy to make a friend, after  
sitting alone on a bus.*

This is where I talk about what a blade is.

*At lunch I ate my bone, as a frog was eating a fly.  
But then the room went silent, and I  
couldn't believe my eyes. In walked a huge  
bull, looking tall, strong, and mean.  
He was the scariest bull my eyes had ever seen.*

Everyone knows this is the bully.

*I barked in a very low voice, "Guys, who is that?"  
"Tully the Bully, stay away from him,"  
meowed an orange cat. As Tully walked  
toward our table, I felt very scared.  
He laughed at my blade, then stole  
my bone; all the animals stared.*

*I sat there in shock, wanting to run  
home to my crate.  
But a nice bird shared her seeds,  
putting some on my plate.*

This is where I ask the kids about what the bird demonstrated  
It's empathy  
Kids are so smart!

*Of course, that day at recess it was just as I had feared:  
"That's a silly-looking leg, "*

*I heard so loud and clear.  
I turned around and saw Tully. As I looked  
him in the eye, I kept thinking to myself  
"Roxy Roo, please don't cry."*

*Right when I was about to bark, a funny  
thing came to be: My new friend Clementine  
tiptoed up and stood next to me. This made  
Tully angry, and he started to bellow out,  
"Hey Clementine, you have a funny-looking snout."*

Now they're both being bullied  
We talk about upstanders  
It's the same thing as a bystander intervention  
When someone does something about bullying instead of ignoring it

*I looked over at Clementine; we  
both felt hurt and scared.  
Then something started to happen;  
we both were not prepared.*

*All the animals joined us: they  
flew, they walked, they hopped.  
After hearing Tully's words, they  
were ready for this to stop.*

[ one page omitted ]

*Tully slowly looked down, and  
then we heard him moo,  
"I didn't know how to make friends; bullying  
was easier to do." "I've never liked my  
horns, and I've always felt too tall."  
I barked back, "Tully, you don't  
have to feel ashamed at all."*

*"Maah" said the goat, "I don't like having a beard."  
Then the snake hissed, "I don't like being feared."  
Then the owl hooted, "It's hard being the smartest one."  
Then the bird chirped, "Wearing glasses is not that fun."*

This is where we talk about how everyone is insecure.

*Tully finally understood that  
we all have felt this way.  
He learned that words can be hurtful,  
and it matters what you say.  
We all agreed to forgive him, and all  
could start again, that we could play  
together, if he acted like a friend.*

We talk about what you think Tully needs to do to gain their friendship  
The kids usually say be nice  
Be kind  
And someone usually says he needs to apologize  
The kids read the apologies

*He said sorry for teasing me and stealing the bone off my plate.*

*He said sorry to the frog for making fun of the flies he ate.*

*He said sorry to the snake for taking his lunch money.*

*He said sorry to the cat for saying she wasn't good at sports.*

*He said sorry to the mouse for teasing her that she is short.*

*He said sorry to the turtle for teasing him for losing the race.*

*After school I told my parents what  
happened with the bully,  
The lesson he learned, and now guess what?  
I have a new friend, Tully! That night I lay  
awake in my crate, happy as can be.  
I couldn't wait to get on the bus,  
with Tully sitting next to me.*

So in this book, Roxie is nervous to go to a new school wearing her prosthesis  
Kids can identify with feeling nervous starting a new school and living with a difference  
The most important lesson is that one person can change someone's life with kind words  
Words have power  
You have that power  
And the choice is yours  
What do we learn?  
Words matter  
It's not ok to hurt others  
Tully felt insecure but that doesn't give you the right to be a bully  
I also have activities with this book  
This one I love  
Kids can even teach their parents what a prosthesis is  
"Diversity comes in all shapes, sizes, level of ability and levels of acceptance. It is not a one size fits all. Living with a disability is something we can all relate to. It's about having your biggest insecurity on display all day every day." - Cadie Jessup Ellis

I spoke with a child named Beauden

This is his parent's advice:

"I think my number one advice would be to not hold them back- don't helicopter a much. My son is capable of doing sooo many things on his own without our help and sometimes we jump in to take over and he gets upset or even if he doesn't, it's just us getting in his way when we don't have to be."



The point is that children are resilient  
I see children who are 3 who are walking beautifully  
Parents need to let them be themselves  
From both of my books, the lessons are

- It's Okay to Be Different.
- Different is Awesome.
- Be Yourself.
- Have Empathy.
- Words are Powerful.
- You Can Make or Break Someone's Day With Your Words.
- Be an Upstander, Not a Bystander.
- Be Kind and Inclusive.

I hand out cards to 5th & 6th graders  
The things kids write just blow me away  
We can talk about how difference is ok  
We're all unique  
It would be boring if everyone is the same  
So I encourage you to use these books  
They promote kindness and inclusion  
Does anyone have questions?

[2022/10/28 07:33] Shiloh e. (Shiloh Emmons): applause

[2022/10/28 07:34] Pecos Kidd: Excellent!

[2022/10/28 07:34] Stella Wyx (StellaWixom Resident): clap clap clap

[2022/10/28 07:34] Gentle Heron: Thank you, Hillary.

QUESTION: I know that your books are often used for bibliotherapy. Have you noticed a difference between kids' reactions to Roxy and her friends between those who read the books on their own, and those who participate in a reading and group discussion?

[2022/10/28 07:35] Elektra Panthar: HS: I'm not sure - it depends on the child, I also work with children with learning disabilities

I heard that some read it and felt brave to go to the dentist

[2022/10/28 07:35] Stella Wyx (StellaWixom Resident): I think your books fill a much needed niche

[2022/10/28 07:36] Elektra Panthar: DD: Thank you for the presentation- My son went to school in California and I found that there's a 0 tolerance policy about bullying. I know that bullies come also from violent situations at home

I liked that in the book the bully explains why he acted that way

HS: I wanted to be careful with the idea of forgiveness, because it's tough

Elementary schools have acronyms

That embody the spirit of the schools, and one of these kids said that the bully owned his actions

DD: Thank you for doing that

Sometimes I see that books for kids are a lot [more] black or white about this

[2022/10/28 07:38] Elektra Panthar: Mook Wheeler: COMMENT: I have always disagreed strongly with this common saying: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me." It is also unbelievably ironic that this is an old English children's rhyme, usually employed in the playground.

HS: exactly, it's usually the other way around

I asked kids if they knew how they felt when someone said something good or bad about them

I help them realize how important words are

[2022/10/28 07:39] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): COMMENT: Some bullies don't have the emotional maturity or have been shown good role models to help them express their feelings and deal with their insecurities in a healthy way

[2022/10/28 07:40] Elektra Panthar: HS: yes unfortunately a lot of bullies don't have Tully's emotional intelligence

I don't see much bullying among younger kids but it increases as they get closer to puberty

DD: talks about an old German book about having to get tough and deal with it (thumbs cut)

[2022/10/28 07:41] Slatan Dryke: terrific book !

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Struwwelpeter>

[2022/10/28 07:41] Gentle Heron: oh yes scary kids book

He has scissors on his arms instead of hands

[2022/10/28 07:41] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): That book gave me nightmares Drax!

[2022/10/28 07:42] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): likely the inspiration for the film, "Edward Scissorhands"?

[2022/10/28 07:42] Elektra Panthar: HS: I can't deal with social media, there's no hiding info

DD: it's fascinating how that book influenced child rearing, it was a cultural artifact. I'm glad there are much better books around now, like yours

[2022/10/28 07:44] Stella Wyx (StellaWixom Resident): I think it is interesting that children during their socialization may have been influenced by that scary book, Drax. Today it sounds or seems like socialization is better, or kinder, 'more inclusive'.

[2022/10/28 07:44] Draxtor Despres: Stella I think actually with social media it is a LOT tougher

[2022/10/28 07:47] Mook Wheeler: /me agrees with Drax. Social media has changed the very foundation of socialisation for children.

[2022/10/28 07:43] Gentle Heron: HAHA we are hearing the RL Roxy

[2022/10/28 07:44] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): RL Roxy is barking. She has something to add :-)

[2022/10/28 07:47] Elektra Panthar: CC: people are loving the RL Roxy in the background :)

HS: I have a puppy as well and if one starts the other one follows!

[2022/10/28 07:43] Elektra Panthar: Gentle Heron: QUESTION: Hillary, please respond to this quote from Alexander Den Heijer: "When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower."

HS: I like that, that's amazing

That gets back to nature vs nurture

In this day and age there are so many resources for kids in school

It's both - the nature of the child but you need to use support available to help them succeed

[2022/10/28 07:44] kayjaybelle Resident: Love that Den Heijer

[2022/10/28 07:44] Elektra Panthar: HS: I did something for my son when he was in college  
I used WhatsApp groups to help him connect with other students his age in his college

[2022/10/28 07:47] Gentle Heron: QUESTION I was going to ask about your publishing experience. Did it help for you to start as a self publisher? How did you find an agent?

[2022/10/28 07:45] Elektra Panthar: HS: I self published the first two books, the third is almost ready and I hope it'll be picked up by a publisher

The book will be about Roxy being worried about being invited at a party and her confidence wavering when she finds out it's a pool party and worry that she can't swim anymore

It's about overcoming your own fear

I'd like for each book to introduce different disabilities, for example an 'invisible' disability

[2022/10/28 07:47] Itico (Itico Spectre): Chronic Fatigue Syndrome would be good.

[2022/10/28 07:54] Elektra Panthar: HS: yes that's a great idea

DD: yes because even now people don't take effects of long covid seriously in other people

[2022/10/28 07:52] Stella Wyx (StellaWixom Resident): I think you are answering some much needed issues thru your stories.

[2022/10/28 07:52] Elektra Panthar: HS: My mother was an author and my [uncle] was her agent

I self published because there was no way I [could have] sent this book and someone would pick it up

With self publishing it can be difficult because there are scams around the internet, and it's also expensive

You can do a free book on amazon if you're interested, though

[2022/10/28 07:55] Shiloh e. (Shiloh Emmons): Your books at St. Jude's hospitals would be helpful, I think.

[2022/10/28 07:55] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): That's a great idea, Shiloh Children's hospitals like St Jude, there's a children's hospital in many cities around the US

[2022/10/28 07:55] Elektra Panthar: HS: yes I wrote it down! I have my book in 32 clinics Children are using the books in their reading room

It's another way to help children

Yes that was on my list, Shiloh

[2022/10/28 07:47] Draxtor Despres: toxic social media for developing human beings = it is incredibly bad

[2022/10/28 07:48] Stella Wyx (StellaWixom Resident): on the other hand, imagine if it was used to help all children and people bloom

[2022/10/28 07:48] Elektra Panthar: DD: 1845 was not a great time for children. But today with social media adults can't fathom how destructive social media can be for kids

We know that there have been studies about social media that teens who have depression tendencies become more depressed, that they can't tell the difference between filters or 'real appearance'

I am an adult and I still get upset sometimes, I can't imagine what kids are exposed to

HS: yes filters disturb me too, this need to erase any difference

My daughter's friend unfortunately committed suicide and nobody realized it was so bad. I

[agree] social media has a lot to do with it, it influences them

[2022/10/28 07:50] Gentle Heron: Oh no!

[2022/10/28 07:51] Elektra Panthar: DD: my generation and older are oblivious to the extent of the damage. Cat is out of the bag now, so we need to talk about it

Stella Wyx (StellaWixom): social media is an anti socialization tool, but a control tool, an anti inclusive tool that leverages power and can be used to eliminate difference, would you say?

HS: yes, I agree

Representation matters. I ordered Roxy plushies made, I plan to contact that hospital as well

My first plush was from Ukraine, a kind lady from Etsy hand stitched Roxy and Maliboo Stuffed animals are a great resource

[2022/10/28 07:57] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): ohhh great!

[2022/10/28 07:57] Gentle Heron: Next you will want puppets

[2022/10/28 07:57] Shiloh e. (Shiloh Emmons): Even the ASPAC, the adopt an animal organization, is now showing advertisements about animals that are challenged, and what great companions these buddies would make

[2022/10/28 07:58] Elektra Panthar: GH: Wonderful presentation, I hope you'll come back and share your next book with us!

HS: I'd be glad to! Feel free to reach out

[2022/10/28 07:57] Draxtor Despres: fantastic presentation

I check out the books

GOOD LUCK !!!!!!!!

GO PUSH IT INTO THE HOSPITALS

[2022/10/28 07:57] Shiloh e. (Shiloh Emmons): great presentation.

[2022/10/28 07:57] Anna (Picwitch1 Resident): Such a great presentation!!

[2022/10/28 07:58] Eme Capalini: awesome presentation! ty so much

[2022/10/28 07:58] Slatan Dryke: brilliant Hillary thanks so much

[2022/10/28 07:58] kayjaybelle Resident: Thank you for your presentation!

[2022/10/28 07:58] Zzri Avian (Zri Portal): Claps! :>

[2022/10/28 07:58] Pecos Kidd: Great job - thank you!

[2022/10/28 07:58] LaLeisureLady Resident: Great presentation!

[2022/10/28 07:58] Elektra Panthar: <https://www.adventuresofroxy.com>

<transcription ends>