

**SEVENTH SENSE DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

This list was originally developed for the publication *Gender Matters: Training for Educators Working with Students with Disabilities*.<sup>\*</sup> As used by 7<sup>th</sup> Sense, it is a living document and names are added periodically. CIDNY would like to thank the authors for allowing our use of this list.

- **Jim Abbott** (1967 - ) was the first major league baseball pitcher with one hand.
- **Jane Addams** (1860-1935) was the founder of the American settlement house movement and the co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. She had congenital spine impairment.
- **Alicia Alonso** (1921- ) is the founder of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. After a series of eye surgeries, she became almost totally blind. She continued to dance and to teach dancing and is acclaimed today as one of the world's foremost ballerinas.
- **Michelle Banks** (1969 - ) is an African American actor who is deaf. She received prizes for her performances in the roles of Titania (Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Miss Brown (in the Broadway play, *For Colored Girls*). She is also the founder and artistic director of the Onyx Theatre Company, a company that features actors of color who are deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing.
- **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827) was a nineteenth-century composer who became deaf in his later life and continued to compose.
- **Ruth Benedict** (1887-1948), deaf as a result of childhood measles, was an anthropologist, one of the first female scientists of renown. Her deafness was believed by Margaret Mead and others to have enabled her to be more aware of the visual aspects of culture, including poetry, architecture and painting. She is best known for her book, *Patterns of Culture* (1934), widely used as an introduction to anthropology even today. Her other publications included *Science and Politics* (1940), and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1946).
- **Sarah Bernhardt** (1844-1923) was a world-renowned actor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After having one leg amputated, she used a wooden prosthesis and always wore long dresses to hide it from the public.
- **Linda Bove** (1945 - ) is an actor who is deaf. She has been a regular on *Sesame Street*, is a member of the Theatre for the Deaf, and has appeared on such television shows as *Happy Days* and *Search for Tomorrow*.
- **Louis Braille** (1809 – 1852) was the inventor of a tactile reading system for people who are blind, now known as Braille. He was blind himself.
- **Christy Brown** (1933 – 1981) was an Irish writer and painter who had cerebral palsy. The film *My Left Foot* was based on one of his autobiographical works.
- **Chris Burke** (1965- ) is an actor with Down syndrome. He had a starring role in the television series *Life Goes On*.
- **John Callahan** (1951- ) is a cartoonist and disability rights activist. He is quadriplegic as a result of a spinal cord injury.



## SEVENTH SENSE DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- **Annie Jump Cannon** (1863 - 1941) was an American astronomer who classified more than 300,000 stars, and was honored as the "Dean of Women Astronomers," receiving a prestigious award from the National Academy of Science. She was deaf.
- **Judi Chamberlin** (1944- ) is an activist for Mental Patients' Liberation, committed to community-based alternatives to institutionalization focused on empowerment for people with psychiatric disabilities. She has a psychiatric disability.
- **Lottie Mae Crook** was one of the first African-American students to enter a white school for the deaf. She is one of the founders and a past president of Black Deaf Advocates.
- **Tom Cruise** (1962 - ) is an actor, director, and producer who has dyslexia. He gained recognition for his roles in such movies as *Rain Man*, *A Few Good Men*, and *Mission: Impossible*. He received an Academy Award nomination and a Golden Globe Award for his portrayal of a disabled Vietnam veteran in *Born on the Fourth of July*. He also received Academy Award nominations for his roles in the films *Jerry Maguire* and *Magnolia*.
- **Tom Dempsey**, who is a double amputee, kicked the longest field goal (63 yards) when he was with the New Orleans Saints in the 70's in a game against the Chicago bears.
- **Robert Dole** (1923 - ) was a member of the U.S. Senate for almost three decades as well as a presidential candidate in the 1996 election. He was seriously wounded while serving in the army during World War II, and has limited use of his right hand and arm.
- **Patty Duke** (1946 - ) is an actor who has bipolar mood disorder. She won an Academy Award for her role as supporting actress in the movie *The Miracle Worker*, in which she played Helen Keller, and has won several Emmy awards for her roles in made for television movies. She is also a national spokesperson for people with mental illness.
- **Sandy Duncan** (1946 - ) is a contemporary stage and television actor widely known for her performance as Peter Pan on Broadway. Surgery to remove a tumor resulted in her having a visual impairment.
- **Thomas Edison** (1847 – 1915) was an inventor; his inventions included the light bulb and the movie projector. He refused medical attention for a hearing impairment, believing that his limitations in hearing fostered his concentration.
- **Fannie Merritt Farmer** (1857 – 1915), was a scientific cook who brought methods of the laboratory into the kitchen, enabling cooking students to have traditional dishes come out the same every time. She became paralyzed at age 16 and had great difficulty walking for the next 10 years. She was hired as a mother's helper by a family friend and encouraged to attend cooking school. This led her to a career as a cooking educator, eventually forming her own school, Miss Farmer's School for Cookery.
- **Phyllis Frelich** (1944 - ), the eldest daughter of a North Dakota family with nine children, won the 1980 Tony Award for Best Actress in the Broadway play *Children of a Lesser God*. She also starred in the play *Hands of the Enemy* about the deaf playwright, Marietta Terby. She is deaf.
- **Temple Grandin** (1947 - ) is a designer of livestock handling equipment. Her innovative designs, which emphasizes the humane treatment of animals, are partly based on her experience as a person with autism; because of her disability, she is highly sensitive to touch and other stimuli from around the environment. She has a doctorate in animal science and lectures widely around the world.



## SEVENTH SENSE DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- **Stephen Hawking** (1942 - ) is a physicist who studies how the universe works; he is internationally known for his theories about black holes in space. He is a professor at Cambridge University, in England, and author of the best seller *A Brief History of Time: From Big Bang to Black Holes*. He has ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease (after the famous baseball player who died of ALS in 1941).
- **Judy Heumann** (1947 - ), a disability rights activist, is one of the founders of the Independent Living Movement and served as the Assistant Secretary of the US Department of Education under President Clinton. She had polio as a child and uses a wheelchair.
- **Hildegard of Bingen** (1098 – 1179) was a German healer and writer during the Middle Ages. Believed to have epilepsy, her "attacks" produced visions from which she developed scientific ideas. She was the head of a convent, a teacher of medicine and theology, and a diagnostician and healer of illness, developing local medicines for poor people. She wrote 14 books covering a range of scientific and religious topics.
- **Craig Hlibok** is a disability rights activist who was the leader of the student revolution at Gallaudet University. He is deaf.
- **John Hockenberry** (1956 - ) is an American journalist who is paraplegic as the result of a spinal cord injury. He has worked for NPR, ABC, and NBC, at times traveling rugged, dangerous terrain to cover international news.
- **Homer** was a Greek epic poet from the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC who, according to tradition, was blind. He is the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.
- **Linda Hunt** (1945 - ) won an Academy Award in 1981 for her performance in *The Year of Living Dangerously*. She has also appeared in many stage dramas and has been nominated for a Tony Award. Hunt is a person of short stature.
- **Geri Jewel** (1958 - ) is a comedian and actor who is best known for her role on the television series *The Facts of Life*. She has cerebral palsy.
- **I. King Jordan** (1943 - ) is an educator and currently the President of Gallaudet University; he is deaf.
- **Frida Kahlo** (1907 – 1954) was a Mexican painter whose works have achieved great recognition in recent years. She had multiple disabilities, including mobility disabilities.
- **Helen Keller** (1880 – 1968) was a world-renowned lecturer, author, educator, and activist who was blind and deaf.
- **Dorothea Lange** (1895 – 1965) was a world-famous twentieth-century photographer and photojournalist who had polio.
- **Audre Lorde** (1934 – 1992) was an African-American writer who published nine volumes of poetry and five works of prose and was the recipient of many honors and awards for her work. She had cancer.
- **Juliette Gordon Low** (1860 – 1927) was the founder of the Girl Scouts. She had a hearing impairment.



## SEVENTH SENSE DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- **Wilma Mankiller** (1945 - ), a longtime activist for Indian rights, served as Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation for several years; she was the first woman to hold such a high-ranking position in a major North American tribal government. She has myasthenia gravis, a form of muscular dystrophy.
- **Marlee Matlin** (1965 - ) is an actor who is deaf. She played Sarah in the movie *Children of a Lesser God* and won the 1987 Academy Award for Best Actress.
- **John Milton** (1608 – 1674) was a famous English poet whose works include the epic *Paradise Lost*. He was also a strong advocate for religious freedom and democracy during a tumultuous time in English history, supporting the pro-democracy government of Oliver Cromwell. He was blind during the last twenty-two years of his life.
- **Mary Tyler Moore** (1934 - ) is a well-known television, screen and stage actor. She starred in several major TV sit-coms, including *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and received a number of Emmy awards for her television work. She was also nominated for an Academy Award for her role in the film *Ordinary People*. She has had diabetes for most of her life.
- **Susan Nussbaum** (1953 - ) is an actor and playwright as well as a disability rights activist. Many of the plays she has written challenge disability stereotypes. She has a spinal cord injury and is paraplegic as the result of a car accident.
- **Kitty O'Neill** (1948 - ) is a race car driver and Hollywood stunt woman who is deaf.
- **Mademoiselle Paradis of Vienna** (1759 – 1824) was a composer and organist who performed in major cities in Europe. She became blind at age three.
- **Itzak Perlman** (1945 - ) is a world-renowned violinist who began playing the violin as a young child and had his first solo recital at age ten. He uses braces and crutches as a result of polio, contracted when he was four, and performs sitting down. In addition to his musical career, he is an advocate for disability rights.
- **John Wesley Powell** (1834 – 1902) was an explorer and geologist. He successfully led one of the earliest expeditions down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, and was commissioned by Congress to conduct one of the first surveys of the entire Rocky Mountain region. As a young man, he lost his right arm below the elbow as a result of an injury incurred while fighting with the Union army during the Civil War.
- **Ed Roberts** (1939 – 1995) was a disability rights activist, known for his role as founder of the Independent Living Movement. A winner of the MacArthur “Genius Award,” he used his cash prize to start the World Institute on Disability, an organization that addresses disability issues worldwide. He was quadriplegic as the result of polio.
- **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** (1882 – 1945) was the 32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States, successfully guiding the country out of the Great Depression and much of World War II; he was the only American president in history elected for four terms. He had limited use of his legs as the result of polio.
- **Wilma Rudolph** (1940 – 1994) was a 1960 Olympic Gold Medal winner. A runner who had a combination of pneumonia, scarlet fever, and polio as a child, paralyzing her left leg, she eventually regained her ability to walk and run, and won three medals for the 100-, 200-, and 400-meter races in the Olympics.



**SEVENTH SENSE DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

- **Harold Russell** (1914-2002) was an actor and disability rights activist; he was a double amputee who lost both hands while serving as a sergeant in the army during World War II. He won two Oscars for his role in the film *The Best of Our Lives*.
- **Laura Redden Searing** (1840-1923) was a writer who wrote under the male pseudonym Howard Glyndon. A war correspondent during the Civil War, she interviewed Lincoln and many Union generals. Her war poems were published in 1864 and her "Belle Missouri" became the war song of the Missouri Unionists. She was deaf.
- **Harriet Tubman** (1820-1913) was a fugitive slave and conductor on the Underground Railroad that brought other slaves to freedom. She also promoted the establishment of schools for freed slaves, began a home for elderly people, and participated in the movement for women's suffrage. She is reported to have had fainting spells and is now believed to have had epilepsy.
- **Stevie Wonder** (1950- ) is an outstanding popular musician who composes, sings, and plays a variety of instruments. An African American, he was one of the earliest "cross-over" artists, appealing to diverse audiences. He has been blind since birth.