Aspire Magazine - Winter 2020 Edition

Page 1 - Cover

Images: A large Artichoke Piece used as the Ed Roberts Award. Surrounded by photos of RJ Mitte, Ali Stroker, Stephanie Thomas, and Zack Gottsagen.

Page 2 - The San Francisco Foundation’s advertisement.

Image: a photo of Ed Roberts in his chair, smiling in front of a poster that says “Let My People Ride.” Beside this photo is a quote from Ed Roberts to the San Francisco Foundation in 1987 that says, “I am convinced that we are making the most profound social change that our society has ever seen. The vision - and it is a clear vision - is one of equal opportunity.”

Graphic: A banner against a blue background that says, “Thank you, TheCIL! We’re proud to partner with you, since 1973, to create an equitable Bay Area where everyone thrives.”

The photo of Ed Roberts was taken by Rod Dresser.

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Page 4 - Ability Center’s Advertisement - “AbilityCenter, Elevating the Quality of Life.”

Proudly serving the Bay Area for over Ten Years. Call at 916-392-1196.

A photo at the center of a Braunability Red Minivan with a ramp leading up to an open side door. Side photos of a Braunability scooter, lift-chair passenger seat, contraption that brings a mobility device up into the trunk, a ramp, and a stair lift.

Page 5 - A conversation with *Angels of Mercy* star, producer, and co-writer. Owen Kent critiques eugenics, the medical model, and societal norms in his new film.

TheCIL: You studied film and media at Berkeley. Were you making any films before school?

Owen: I’ve always been interested in media and film. I started making movies when I was a pretty young kid. Something that has always captured my imagination and allowed me to communicate stories and complicated ideas to someone in an entertaining way.

TheCIL: Is there anyone you worked with there who you continue to work with?

Owen: Yeah, a lot of my friends in college were a lot of the ones who worked on Angels of Mercy, which is a feature film we’ve been working on for a couple of years now. The director, director of photography, and gaffer were all friends of mine in school.

TheCIL: Can you share more about *Angels of Mercy*?

Owen: The film is a home invasion thriller. I’m trying to do a new take on disability commentary, and it may be one some people disagree with, but I think it’s important to have a dialogue going and a critical conversation about representation in the media. The story follows Zack who is a computer securities professional, and it follows his story as a group of eugenicists try break into his house and “cure” him of his disability, but their definition of cure is pretty sinister.

It’s a horror movie, so there’s a bit of gore and all of that. But it’s fun. I like horror movies a lot because you’re able to address societal concerns in a way. When you live in fantasy, and horror especially, you’re able to be critical of certain environments and societal norms. The bad guys’ modus operandi in the movie is to have their victims persuaded into suicide, because they say that someone with a disability obviously has a reason to end their own life. And that’s something that’s definitely perpetuated in media, and we address it.

TheCIL: There were about 30 people involved in creating *Angels of Mercy*, which is pretty big for an independent film. How did the team come together?

The cool thing about making a film that involved disability is that it’s such a novel topic to Hollywood, so a lot of people were really interested in what we’re doing. If we were doing a more standard film it might be different. A lot of people were really excited to talk to us. I feel like the disability community has a really awesome sense of community. We kinda talked to one person who would introduce us to someone else and went from there.

Page 6 + 7 - Creating a Guide to Hollywood Inclusivity - a conversation with RespectAbility President Jennifer Mizrahi

**What brought you to forming RespectAbility?**

Jennifer: There are a lot of amazing disability organizations including the independent living movement, and RespectAbility has really been built on the shoulders of giants who have accomplished so much. We felt there were some gaps we wanted to fill -- we wanted to be across all disabilities whether physical, sensory, mental health, learning, and so forth, and we wanted to focus on opportunity and how we maximize human potential for people with disabilities (PWD) in employment.

**What role do you see that RespectAbility has taken in the national conversation surrounding disability activism, inclusion, and employment?**

PWD should be seen by what we can do and not by what we can’t. There are many people with different pots of money who care about PWD having a better future, and we need to blend and braid our resources and talents and dreams, so that we can achieve on behalf of the community and enable PWD to live their full and most independent lives.

**RespectAbility released the Hollywood Disability Inclusion Toolkit, which seems to be the most comprehensive guide of its kind that exists. Have you seen conversations and structures surrounding disability within the entertainment industry shift since this release? What kind of feedback has there been?**

If you give people a guide, it’s just not enough. The guide is the handbook that goes with our in-person trainings. There is still a long way to go, but this year there was a 50% improvement with the number of characters with a disability with regular roles in series television. A 50% increase is still terrible and we have a long way to go. Disability on screen has typically shown what we can’t do, and has typically been white straight men as if women and people of color don’t have disabilities just like anyone else. We’re very delighted to see the very positive reaction that Hollywood has given us to this work. Our organization is in its sixth year and the guide is a year old. We’ve been reaching out to Hollywood and opened an office in Los Angeles very recently where we have three professionals working with us.

**What kind of opportunities does Respectability have in the Bay Area, or that people in the Bay Area could pursue?**

Respectability is looking to find four young adults with disabilities who want to be the Ed Roberts and Judy Heuemanns of the future. They need to be college-educated - not necessarily with a degree - who want to go into advocacy, non-profit management, or communications. We will pay for them to fly to Washington DC, we will pay for lodging, and we will pay $15/hour for a nine week intensive training program with us at our national headquarters with a goal of getting them a job back in the Bay Area where they will be able to take the skills they got and the context they got in Washington to help lift up the entire disability community there from within.

This opportunity is ongoing. We do three cohorts a year of young leaders, and we have 169 graduates from the program so far who have gone on to great jobs - working with President Obama at the White House, working with Senator Schumer doing disability inclusion for the US Senate, people working at disability organizations across the country. They come from all over but the difference is we have a place-based funder who is willing to pay for travel, housing, and the hourly stipend. We don’t want it to be limited to people with financial means to go to Washington and train for free, we think it’s important for people with challenging finances to be in leadership because those are people who know our community best, because so much of our community frankly lives in poverty. The majority of children with disabilities in our country are people of color, and we need more POC with disabilities, and more members of the LGBTQ community with disabilities, to be front and center in leadership in the disability movement.

Page 8 - Timeline of Prominent Award Winners with Disabilities. Graphic list including photos of each honoree.

1946 - Harold Russell won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in *The Best Years of Our Lives*. Russell lost both of his hands while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II.

1973 - Stevie Wonder took home his first five GRAMMY Awards for *Innervisions*, including Album of the Year. Since then, Wonder has won an additional 20 GRAMMY Awards across four decades,

1986 - Marlee Matlin won the Academy Award for Best Actress for *Children of a Lesser God* at only 21 years old. To date, she is the only deaf performer to have won an Academy Award.

2019 - Ali Stroker won the Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical for her performance in *Oklahoma!* She became the first wheelchair user to win a Tony award.

2019 - Zack Gottsagen starred in the 2019 breakout hit *The Peanut Butter Falcon*, alongside Shia Labeouf and Dakota Johnson. He was named the 2019 Associated Press Breakthrough Entertainer of the Year.

Can you name any others?

Page 9 - Lyft’s Advertisement.

Over top an illustration of the front of a transit bus on a busy street, text says: Lyft is proud to work with community partners to increase access to transportation. Lyft’s Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) Pilot currently operates from 7am to Midnight, 7 days a week. In the app, go to Settings and toggle on “Wheelchair Access. In San Francisco, there are pick-ups in San Francisco County and SFO Airport. Drop-offs anywhere. In Los Angeles, there are pick-ups and drop-offs in Los Angeles County. Stay tuned for exciting service updates!

Text: My experience with Lyft’s WAV Program, written by Hector Ochoa, Policy Director at Southern California Resource Services for Independent Living. Photo of a man who uses a power-chair in the back of a Lyft vehicle.

Consistent, reliable transportation does more than simply move an indivudal from point A to point B. It has the potential to open up realms of opportunity and independence for individuals and whole communities. Lyft Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) service in Los Angeles County and San Francisco has done just that. It has expanded transportation options for many disabled people, including my brother, Herman, and I.

Since its pilot launch in July of 2019, my brother and I have made use of the service nearly two dozen times - from medical appointments, to work travel and even for leisure, like going to the movies. The service has truly given us increased independence. I myself drive my own vehicle, a modified, fully automated van, and my brother is a full-time paratransit user; but having the added availability of on-demand rideshare service like Lyft WAV has given both of us so much more flexibility.

I’m ineligible for paratransit service, but through the Lyft WAV pilot, I have a same-day service at my disposal should I choose not to drive in L.A. traffic or have to commute to areas like Downtown L.A, where parking is a real headache. Lyft’s dedicated and attentive WAV Team has made all the difference as this program continues to improve and grow. As an advocate for the disability community, working with rideshare companies hasn’t always come easy, but Lyft has continuously engaged with organizations such as SCRS-IL, a Center for Independent Living in L.A, where work as a Policy Director. I’m also excited to see Lyft is partnering with Bay Area organizations, such as Self Help for the Elderly, for their WAV Pilot in San Francisco County. Lyft continues to demonstrate their commitment to equity and have proven to me firsthand that they are “always looking at ways to expand transportation opportunities to the communities that need it most.: For my brother and I, and so many others, we look forward to continued engagement with Lyft to inform the best possible WAV service for the community.

Page 10 - The Fourth Annual Ed Roberts Awards Honorees - Graphic of a white banner listing each honoree against a black background with the Artichoke Award.

RJ Mitte: RJ is an actor and advocate best known for his role as Walter “Flynn” White Jr. in AMC’s Emmy and Golden Globe-Award-winning thriller *Breaking Bad*.

Stephanie Thomas: Stephanie is a Disability Fashion Styling Expert, and Founder and CEO of Cur8able, a business dedicated to the art and science of dressing with disabilities.

Ali Stroker: Ali is a Tony Award-winning actress and star of *Oklahoma!* On Broadway. She also played TheCIL’s own Judy Heumann in Comedy Central’s *Drunk History*.

Zack Gottsagen: Zack is the star of *The Peanut Butter Falcon* and was recently named the Associated Press Breakthrough Entertainer of 2019.

Jim Fousekis: Jim will receive a Special Recognition Award at the Ed Roberts Awards for his fundraising efforts as head of the Friends of CIL from 1984-1988.

Page 11-13 - Profile on Ali Stroker, featuring a photo of the actress sitting and smiling against a pink background.

Between rehearsals and press appearances, Ali Stroker took some time to meet with TheCIL in a Manhattan studio. We discussed her Tony-award winning *Oklahoma!* performance and the journey that led her to becoming the first person who uses a wheelchair to be nominated or to win a Tony.

Ali was born and raised in New Jersey, where she was first introduced to musical theatre by her neighbor on the Jersey Shore. The pair staged a backyard production of *Annie*, where Ali had her first starring role. From that point on, she was hooked.

At eighteen, Ali moved to New York to study drama at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. She debuted professionally in 2012, where she was a contestant on Ryan Murphy’s *The Glee Project*, a competitive reality show where the winner earned a spot on *Glee* -- a show well known for featuring stories that weren’t celebrated in the mainstream. This sensibility is a core component of theatre culture, where drama and performance have long served as a haven for those in search of belonging, or for a place where they can shine.

Ali knows that her talent on stage speaks for itself, and seemed perplexed that her disability gets so much spotlight, saying “People don’t realize that the way that I move and the way that I am in the world, the way that I move around New York City is just normal. It’s the way I do things. That goes for a lot of people living with disabilities. I don’t see it as being different or a disadvantage.”

Although Ali placed second in *The Glee Project,* the creators were nevertheless impressed with her talent and offered her a guest role on *Glee*. Reminiscing on that time, Ali shared, “getting to tell a story a little bit like mine on *Glee* was such a thrill; it was my break when I first got into the industry. I’m so grateful for that forever.”

When pursuing roles, Ali viewed her wheelchair as an opportunity and a tool that provided her the creative and strategic power to translate each role into her own language. “My wheelchair is sort of my secret weapon. It’s the thing that makes me different and it’s also a gift,” she expressed. When approaching a role, she asks herself: “How am I going to translate movement designed for people who are able-bodied to work for me in my chair?” The creativity springs forth from there, and she can enjoy the added pleasure of building upon her vocabulary of physical movement.

“One of my mottos is that I believe that when you have a disability and you enter a room, it is your responsibility to host the party. What I mean is I have a choice of how I want to be seen.”

Ali simply does not see her disability as a limitation or challenge in her field. “I believe that the disability doesn’t need to be written into a script in order for me to be able to play a role. I’m not addressing my wheelchair in every room I’m in, and yet the chair is with us. So we’re forced to address it whether we’re talking about it or not,” she maintained. She sees this as a way that stage and film performance allow actors to portray disability with authenticity.

On June 9, 2019, Ali won the Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical. When she dreamed of winning, she thought of her younger self, watching the Tonys every year and looking for someone like herself. Now in that position, she accepted her award and publicly dedicated it to youth with disabilities, proclaiming to the community that we are now represented in theatre at the highest level.

Ali beamed when speaking about the advances currently being made by and for people with disabilities. “Now that I have time, I’d like to follow up on [my acceptance speech] and say that this is a call to action. No more excuses. Any challenge you have, any limitation, whatever the disability, you have an opportunity to go after your dreams. No one’s stopping you, and I believe that this is the time. Dream big!”

With *Oklahoma!* ending its Broadway run on January 19th, she anticipates a period of rest and reflection before embarking on new projects. Her first and foremost priority is her growth as an artist, human, and activist. She wants to continue focusing on her advocacy work for the disability community, particularly within her world of theatre.

The 2019 Tony Awards took place at Radio City Music Hall. When Ali accepted her award, she entered from stage left rather than from the audience because there was no ramp leading to the stage. This is the case for most performing venues in New York, where a venue may be accessible for patrons but not for those on stage. Ali is determined to change that, emphasizing “I think it’s important to make backstage more accessible for actors and crew. In all of the cabaret venues around New York, where I first began to be seen in the city, most stages aren’t accessible. I really believe that if there’s a will, there’s a way. And I have the will, so I want to find more ways to create accessibility in those venues.”

Page 14-16 - Profile on RJ Mitte, featuring a photo of him pushing his hair back while speaking at Texas A&M University.

At the age of 16, RJ Mitte rose to international acclaim for his role as Walter “Flynn” White Jr. in AMC’s *Breaking Bad*. As one of the most popular television shows of the last decade, *Breaking Bad* reached audiences beyond its expected scope -- while primarily urban adult audiences were watching premium television at that time, this show - taking place in Albuquerque, New Mexico - found popularity with rural crowds, young people, and viewers outside of the United States. RJ’s role as Walt Jr. was remarkable, one reason being that he truthfully portrays a teenager’s life with cerebral palsy, which RJ himself has. With a platform this large, RJ embraced an opportunity for public advocacy, viewing it as a personal responsibility.

“With a show like *Breaking Bad*, you’re able to affect people and open the door to provide more opportunities. It’s a privilege and honor to make that happen, and it’s a responsibility bigger than yourself. Your actions alone don’t dictate your life, but they can make the lives of those around you better.”

RJ grew up in Louisiana and Texas where he was surrounded by a supportive family who nurtured in him a will to achieve. He credits his grandparents for teaching him at a young age to remove “I can’t” from his vocabulary. “Whether you can or can’t achieve your goals is a conscious decision. It’s not that you can or you can’t. It’s that you won’t,” RJ proposed.

This mindset mirrors one of independent living’s animating principles, which is that people with disabilities’ should forget about what we can’t do and focus on what we want to do, and then determine how to make it happen.

RJ agreed, “I think that’s the most practical approach possible - make your goals, figure out how to achieve them, and face it head on.”

Championing this attitude, RJ has experience in various arenas - film and television, fashion, sports - but was most determined to be an actor. He recognizes that a strong will does not negate the obstacles that must be overcome; the nature of the film industry is one where you have to keep pushing forward, and if you don’t have thick skin, you better grow it. “It literally takes everything from you to make the dream happen,” he shared.

RJ has certainly given acting all he’s got. He mentioned that he deliberately chooses roles that are close to his heart and that will push himself to see different aspects of who he is, both as a person and as a performer. RJ said, “I prefer roles that stand out and that you don’t usually see -- the awkward, quirky, almost avant-garde-ish things. If it’s a good part and well-written, I’m down.”

For the last four years, RJ has poured himself into the making of *Triumph*, a film he stars in and executive-produced. It follows a teenager with cerebral palsy and his journey towards becoming a wrestler.

With all the stylistic flair of a John Hughes flick, the film is currently in post-production and refining its soundtrack of 80s hits. Purchasing the rights to many of these songs can be quite expensive, and definitely out of the price range for a low-budget indie film. So, RJ and the film’s crew avoided this obstacle with a creative solution: instead of buying the rights, they are planning to hire a crew of artists with disabilities to sing, play, and remaster the music.

Creating opportunities like this is exactly the kind of vision RJ described when discussing fostering vibrant communities. “Having a healthy community and the ability to provide opportunities where we can move forward is something that’s really freeing, alongside being a lot of responsibility. I don’t want people to forget that they have power.”

RJ is now pursuing and promoting opportunities outside of just acting, laughing that “there’s always something going on with me.” He likes trying new things and taking on new responsibilities, and recently assumed the role of President at his family’s foundation, the Mitte Foundation. The foundation provides scholarships and grants to organizations in central and rural Texas and focuses on education, disability services, aging, and youth development. RJ was excited to announce that this year, all of the high school students to whom the foundation recently pledged college scholarships will be graduating from secondary school.

Across the different spaces he occupies as an actor, producer, and foundation president, RJ emphasized that his biggest takeaway from his work is seeing that you can actually make a difference. “It comes in various capacities, but it’s great to see that what you’ve done has an effect on people. And it’s great to see results. Even if they’re positive or negative, seeing results matters. Something happened, and that’s more than you can say for most.” Thinking like this comprises RJ’s rejection of an “I can’t” mentality - whether you win or lose, “you come back and do it again. You say, ‘thank you sir, may I have another?’ And then you keep going.”

Page 17-19 - Profile on Stephanie Thomas, featuring a photo of the styling expert sitting and smiling against a grey backdrop.

Stephanie Thomas, founder and CEO of Cur8able, has created her own space right at the intersection of fashion, business, media, and advocacy. When I commented that she seems really busy, she wondered, “Why does everyone say that? Am I doing too much?”

The truth is, Stephanie is doing the trailblazing work that she believes she needs to do, especially as a person with a disability. She’s developed a disability styling system, regularly styles for brands and models, runs a podcast and a blog, teaches at Woodbury University, and recently finished writing a textbook, *Fitting In: The Social Implications of Fashion and Dressing with Disabilities*, to be released this spring. On top of all of that, she’s also a SAG-AFTRA voice actor.

Her path hasn’t been straight, nor one without struggle. In the early 90s, she packed her whole life into 23 boxes and moved alone to Los Angeles, where she began working in radio and TV. With a lifelong interest in fashion, she’d been following clothing and retail trends, gathering what she calls “ethnographic research.” This included stopping people on the streets and talking to anyone who would engage. “It’s kind of what I do, I turn every conversation into a conversation about dressing with disabilities,” she confessed.

“What I found is that people just don’t really understand disability. So I decided to come up with something that would allow me to act as a bridge and liaison with where the fashion industry is and where it has to inevitably go. And that’s where the Disability Fashion Styling System was born.” That was in 2004.

The Disability Fashion Styling System has three principles - Accessible, Smart, Fashionable. Each piece of clothing must be easy to put on and take off, medically safe, & loved by the wearer. An integral component of Stephanie’s styling process is having conversations and hanging out with clients so she has a clear vision of how her clients want to present to the world and how she can style them to express that.

“I style to honor bodies -- not hide them, not apologize for them, and not make people feel sorry for them. I feel like the thing we don’t do for people with disabilities is see them, and one thing fashion does is it allows people to show up as how they see themselves in their mind,” she shared.

While popular discourse on the psychology of dress is widespread, finding fashion-related literature that centers diversity and inclusion can be difficult, especially when it comes to disability. “We usually learn about disability through awareness days, or someone in our family has a disability, or we get injured. There’s been no big effort or push to educate people on disability, or disability as a culture,” Stephanie contended. So, in typical Stephanie Thomas fashion, she identified a gap in social learning and created a space to educate and bring awareness. Through her textbook *Fitting In*, readers can explore the narratives that form disability culture, as well as the prevailing biases and social implications that circulate around it.

With 28 years of expertise, Stephanie was recently honored in the 2019 Business of Fashion 500, a prestigious index of creatives, stylists, designers, and more who are shaping modern fashion. Stephanie was the only person representing disability fashion on the list. Although change happens slowly, major advances like this hold culture-shifting potential.

So, what does the future of adaptive clothing look like? First and foremost, Stephanie believes that the existence of adaptive clothing needs to be public knowledge, and that it needs some in-store, physical real estate, as if to say “We see you!”

The future of truly accessible clothing lies in universal design, where clothing is simply manufactured to be safe and accessible for all wearers -- with the exception of seated and vertical body types, where specific design for these body types and tailoring may be the best avenues.

“You know who’s killing the game right now? Footwear. So many brands are getting rid of laces, or making their footwear slide-ons.” She particularly commended Zappos, who she frequently works with, and their adaptive footwear line.

Despite Stephanie’s (and others’) commitment to progress, adaptive fashion is still seen as a niche, and this needs to change. We know that there's an incredibly high demand for this market when billions of people have disabilities. In fact, [Vogue](https://www.voguebusiness.com/consumers/adaptive-clothing-differently-abled-asos-target-tommy-hilfiger) estimates it’s a $400 billion industry. While Stephanie is clearly doing the work, she believes that the disability community as a whole must want more and expect more for their own sake, and to create some momentum.

“I want [people with disabilities] not to berate but personally write their favorite brands, saying ‘hey, I love your brand! I’d love to be able to wear it more! I want them to expect to be treated with dignity and independence, to expect to walk into a store and not have to fight with the rails because there’s not enough room for a wheelchair. I want them to expect that someone will understand the difference in their seated body type.”

Page 20-22 - Profile on Zack Gottsagen, featuring a semi close-up photo of the actor smiling against a white background.

When he was three years old, Zack Gottsagen told his mom, Shelley, that he was going to be an actor. Fast forward 32 years, and he is the star of *Peanut Butter Falcon*, an epic road drama directed by Michael Schwartz and Tyler Nilson. He plays Zak, a man with Down Syndrome who escapes his caring but overbearing social worker, Eleanor, played by Dakota Johnson, at an assisted-living institution in order to finally live his life on his own terms. He runs into a fisherman in trouble with the law named Tyler, played by Shia Labeouf, and the two become fast friends on the run together. The film has enjoyed massive popular and critical success with a 95% rating on review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes and box office earnings over $20 million, making it the biggest indie hit of 2019.

TheCIL’s slogan, “Be Your Own Normal,” encourages people with disabilities to decide for themselves who they are and what they want to do. Zack was very familiar with independent living philosophy as his mother spent 18 years working at independent living centers in Palm Beach and Miami, where Zack was involved in programs and council meetings for a large part of his life.

Shelley recalled that on the day Zack was diagnosed with Down Syndrome, the doctors said, “he will never walk or talk; he’ll be a total vegetable.” She simply replied “Well, it’s a good thing I’m a vegetarian.” We mentioned how Ed Roberts had a similarly quick retort to the same prediction - “If I’m a vegetable, I’m going to be an artichoke; prickly on the outside with a big heart in the middle.”

TheCIL’s 4th annual Ed Roberts Awards will take place on January 23, 2020, and after one conversation with Zack, we knew we had to include him as our fourth honoree at the awards. The theme this year is disability in entertainment.

Zack met *Peanut Butter Falcon*’s directors at Zeno Mountain Farm, an artistic organization that gathers an inclusive community involved in arts, sports, film, music and the like. It was there he starred as the antagonist in *Bulletproof Jackson*, a Western short where a man retraces the legend of his grandfather. Zack knew he wanted to go on to make features, one reason being that “you don’t make a lot of money in short films.”

Schwartz and Nilson then endeavored to write a feature film for Zack. They spent their nights couchsurfing throughout filming, dedicating all of their resources to *Peanut Butter Falcon*’s creation. When offered a hefty sum to feature an A-list actor to play Zak, they turned it down. “They wrote this for Zack and believed he was the best to play this role, and maintained that they would not cast someone without a disability,” Shelley shared.

Schwartz, Nilson, and Zack spent two years trying to get eyes from the industry on the script, and eventually shot a short video to pitch instead. “People saw Zack had a talent, and that the world of the film had a texture,” Schwartz remembered. Producers and A-list actors then came on board, and Zack's movie was ready for production.

On working with him, Schwartz said,"There were times when we were running scenes by him and seeing what he thought about the character, and Zack would leave with the script for an hour and come back with notes, saying things like ‘it doesn’t make sense that I would approach a scene this way or from that direction, here’s how I want to do it.’”

In fact, Zack improvised many of the film’s most fun moments. When Labeouf’s character, Tyler, asks Zak what rule #1 of being on the run is, he replies “[to] party!” This was not in the script. Neither was a scene where Zak does a dance on the raft after throwing Eleanor’s car keys into the water, ensuring he won’t be institutionalized again any time soon. When I ask Zack about his favorite part in the film, it’s that moment.

We discussed how the film deliberately grounds itself in the reality that people with disabilities experience, which so often includes negligent institutionalization, base assumptions about an individual’s capabilities, and discriminatory language and violent encounters. Schwartz shared that there were moments on set where Zack had to stand up for himself, and where *Peanut Butter Falcon*’s message really came to life: that it’s not Zack who needed to change, but people needed to change how they thought of and perceived Zack.

“It’s not only about using certain words, but the way you treat a person,” Shelley asserts. One scene in the film particularly illustrates this, when Tyler confronts Eleanor about her over-protectiveness and that although she doesn’t use the r-word, her actions towards Zak say the same thing.

At one point in our conversation, Zack shared, “Just so you know, I love sports.” His favorites are bowling and basketball. That then led us to a discussion about his stunts, which he performed himself - including the 40ft water dive that originally bonds his character and Tyler. “Talk about self-determination,” his mom quipped.

Zack enthusiastically discussed his many talents - acting, playing sports, dancing. When I asked if there’s anything else we should know, he casually said “oh yeah, I rap.” He loves to freestyle, which was a popular hobby on set with fellow cast members Labeouf and Yelawolf. The whole cast got along so well, “hanging out, talking about our lives, making things, and doing things together,” Zack reminisced. Group hugs and appreciation sessions were quite common on set.

Throughout the press tour for *Peanut Butter Falcon*, many people with disabilities have approached Zack about how the film has made a difference in their lives. Zack and Shelley shared how a young man on the autism spectrum gave Zack a superhero outfit, saying “I needed to wear this every day to have the courage to live my life. Now your movie gave me courage and I don’t need this anymore.”

When the experience of living with a disability is so rarely featured on screen (and when that experience is so often portrayed by non-disabled actors), films like *Peanut Butter Falcon* push people from outside of the community to see disability differently. Given the film’s success, we can see that there is space and a need for these stories, too. By simply showing another's reality, these stories can powerfully advocate and overturn narrow perceptions of who people with disabilities are and the lives we lead.

Page 23 + 24 - Profile on Jim Fousekis, featuring a close-up of Jim in TheCIL’s office and an image of the cover of his book, *Spiro and Marie: Looking Back and Giving Back.*

On October 28, Jim Fousekis came to TheCIL’s office to talk about the organization’s early history and his involvement during that time. Jim served as a leader of the Friends of CIL, a group of supporters that helped fundraise and broadcast TheCIL’s services to the community. He worked with Alfred Peet (founder of Peet’s Coffee) to lay a firm economic foundation for the organization and was instrumental in finding ways to involve the private sector and encourage their investment in CIL’s mission.

Jim sat down and began sharing about when he first discovered TheCIL, saying, “At the University of California at Berkeley, I got a very strong sense of public service, and learned that the job of being in this world is not just to take care of yourself, but it's to make sure that you do something for somebody else along the way.” After his undergraduate studies, he went to Yale Law School, which reinforced that thought. “And then I went to a medium-sized law firm in San Francisco that also fostered public service,” he shared. “People in that law firm felt that one should do more than just be a lawyer. So, when I started practicing law, I immediately took on a couple of pro bono cases in the California Supreme Court.”

He continued, “Well, it [was time] to think about what else I wanted to do that's in the public interest.” So, he picked up the Berkeley Gazette, where he remembers first seeing “something called TheCIL, which worked with people with disabilities. They were having some kind of an auction a couple of blocks down from where I lived in Berkeley; I was on Telegraph Avenue at that time. That was TheCIL's headquarters, and I called and I went down there and that was the start. And from then on, it was totally inspiring.”

He eventually met Mr. Alfred Peet. He was the head of the Friends of CIL, and invited Jim to go to his first Friends of CIL meeting. “CIL was having very deep financial problems at the time and it relied a lot on government money, I soon found out. Our new President Ronald Reagan, who by the way, was very much disliked by the disability community, had cut these monies from CIL, and what it meant was that there were tremendous budget cuts going on, almost an impossibility to make payroll. Mr. Peet, as he was called by the staff [as] a beloved figure, made payroll out of his own pocket a number of times.”

TheCIL in the middle of a transition and needed to move to the private sector very quickly, according to Jim, and Mr. Peet was in charge of saving a ship on its way down. “You were taking an organization that they had a budget of say, 3 million dollars and reducing it down to $900,000 or a million,” Jim explained. “And it's a heart-wrenching job, people have to be let go. You're mostly trying to make sure that the ship stays afloat.”

Jim was soon chosen to be Mr. Peet's successor to develop relationships with the private sector so that CIL would not be as reliant on public money.

“And so we started to gear up, to have more meetings, more friends, bringing more people and getting more people involved so that we could expand our financial resources that we had to go to, and started talking to foundations, started talking to the individual people about gifts and started an annual dinner that became a great success,” he shared. “What I found was once anyone got involved with CIL, they were there for all, for everything they had. They understood it's an extremely grassroots organization.”

Jim parted with some final words of wisdom: “And the thing that I would say for anyone who's listening to this is that it's not what you're giving, it's what you're getting. You always get more out of doing something for somebody else than you do if you do anything for yourself.”

Page 25 - TheCIL’s Accelerate Program. An image of a young professional in his wheelchair, smiling at the camera.

Text: Accelerate! From University to Employment. TheCIL’s Accelerate! helps students with disabilities find competitive, open positions or internships that fit your interests and career goals. Email at [accelerate@thecil.org](mailto:accelerate@thecil.org) or call at 510-841-4776. Visit at thecil.org/accelerate.

Page 26 - Kaiser Permanente Advertisement.

Image of the bottom of three children’s feet above a purple banner with text: HEALTHY ALL OVER. Kaiser Permanente is a proud supporter of the Center for Independent Living’s Ed Roberts Awards. Your health needs don’t follow a schedule, so why should you? With the KP mobile app and website, you’re able to make routine appointments, email your doctor, refill most prescriptions and even view most test results. So you can stay closer to everything you need. **Visit kp.org today because together we thrive.** Kaiser Permanente THRIVE.

Page 27 - Why I’ve Struggled Asking for Help by Jeshua Aveno, TheCIL Assistive Technology Coordinator. Image of Jeshua and Madison speaking in a Youtube video. Search Youtube for Jesh and Mads.

Asking for help can often be a difficult task regardless of someone’s ability. If you throw in a characteristic that society still struggles to accept as “normal,” you’ll find that difficulty amplified. Madison and I are no exception. We were both born with different visual impairments which, at times, requires us to use specific methods or tools to complete a task. If that doesn’t work, we’re faced with the decision of whether or not to ask for help.

Why is asking for help difficult for us? Why have we shied away from it more often than not? In our YouTube video, “Why I’ve Struggled with Asking for Help”, we explain four reasons why we, as well as others in the disability community, decide not to ask for assistance from those around us. These reasons are: denial, being a burden, pride, and not learning for the future.

We decided to create this video letting people know there is no shame in needing help. Sometimes people perceive asking for help as a sign of weakness, and sometimes the desire to “prove people wrong” overshadows the need to get a task done. We’ve personally experienced hesitation because we don’t want to burden our loved ones’ time and energy. There is also the concern that people will over-step boundaries and try completing tasks for us rather than guide us or teach us how to overcome an obstacle in the future. In our video, we discuss our personal experiences, how we’ve addressed our roadblocks, and tips for how people with and without a visual impairment can be more helpful (and efficient) in similar situations.

This video is one way we advocate for the blindness community. We utilize social media (i.e. YouTube and Instagram) to showcase different aspects of our lives, whether it be a glimpse of our different interests/hobbies, experiences while traveling, or in-depth discussions of our vision. We aim, first, to publicly illustrate that our blindness is just one characteristic of our identity, which can require alternative methods for being successful, and second to encourage our peers to be active in and engaged with their community.

Page 28 - CIL Staffers discuss TheCIL’s place in the East Bay Community. Munya Mahiya, Mobility Coach, chats with Denise Martinez, Community Connections Coordinator.

*TheCIL’s Mobility Coach, Munya Mahiya, interviewed Community Connections Coordinator Denise Martinez about the CoCo program and her experience joining TheCIL team.*

Munya: Since you coordinate CoCo, what are you hoping to do through these programs?

Denise: I think it’s a big thing when you’re learning something new and you have this anxiety, and this fear when you’re setting out to do it, and I think that’s why Coco is so great. We’re able to teach you along the way how to do it and that you’re not by yourself.

What I’m hoping to get out of the training is for everyone to be able to use public transportation and be more independent, and to be confident overall and have a sense of pride in themselves to go out and do these tasks, whether with someone or eventually on their own.

Munya: Could you talk about the different kinds of outreach you were involved in before you came TheCIL?

Denise: At my job before, our target group was specifically low-income people, so you find similarities with this work but it’s very different in a few ways.

Doing the outreach is very similar - you’re meeting with teachers, social workers, different leaders in the community but it’s not necessarily always a person with a disability. The coursework however has been extremely different; you have to be more patient, break things down into smaller tasks, you know, some of the students that I teach either have a lot of experience with public transportation or none.

Munya: Could you talk about some of the lessons you’ve learned relating to disability and TheCIL’s involvement in the disability movement?

Denise: Things that stuck out to me were learning more about the Ed Roberts Campus; it was always just this landmark to me. For Stuart to go through the history of how TheCIL has made such an impact in the disability community, and learn more about that, you feel proud to work here. You’re just like, this organization is #1! And you wonder, how can I get the world to know about this?

*For more about the Community Connections program, please visit* [*www.thecil.org/coco*](http://www.thecil.org/coco)*.*

Page 29 - Assistive Technology Spotlight

Image: A brown and silver watch. Text: Eone - The Bradly Timepiece - $285.

Eone created a sleek, modern watch that more people can use - and in more ways. Designed for touch when you can’t easily use sight: during a meeting, in a movie theatre, or due to a vision impairment.

Tell time by touch with raised markers and two ball bearings that travel around the watch face in separate, recessed tracks: one for the minute, and one for the hour.

Learn more at [www.thecil.org/assistivetech](http://www.thecil.org/assistivetech)

Image: A braille watch face with a metal band. Text: Dot Watch - Smart Braille $399.

The Dot Watch lets you experience time in a completely new way: without sound, just by yourself. It provides direct access to all the practical features you need so many times throughout each day: Time and Date, Alarm Clark, Timer and Stopwatch. It even tells you the time down to the second. Truly, a new sense of time.

Every text message you receive on the smartphone is instantly translated to Braille and forwarded to your Dot Watch. Read it fast on the watch face and customizable Auto-Scroll.

Learn more at [www.thecil.org/assistivetech](http://www.thecil.org/assistivetech)

Page 30 - Uber’s Advertisement - Accessiving WAV in the Uber App

Text: MV Transportation’s wheelchair accessible vehicles are now available via the Uber app in Los Angeles County and the SAn Francisco Bay Area

How to ride with WAV:

Step 1: Download the Uber APP (<https://ubr.to/2wpc9E5>

Step 2: Request your WAV Step 2(i) - (iv).

Diagram: Step 2(i-iv) is a pictorial diagram. Step 2i shows that when calling an Uber, open the app to the main menu. Step 2ii shows that you must then scroll up on the main menu to see all options. Step 2iii shows that near the bottom of the selections, there is a WAV option that you must click. Stepiv shows that you must tap “confirm” in order for the ride to be called.

Text: Currently enabled for riders in motorized wheelchairs and scooters in Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area - the counties of San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Marin, Sonoma, Solano, Napa, and Santa Cruz.

Affordable, On-Demand Rides in Wheelchair-Accessible Vehicles.

Fast, flexible rides - when and where WAV is available, rides are requested on demand - simply enter your destination and tap to request.

Trips that fit your budget - WAV ride are priced the same as UberX rides.

Specialized drivers to assist you - WAV drivers complete a certification course offered by a third party in safe wheelchair securement.

Follow UberWAV - What is UberWAV? Website and FAQ at uber.com/ride/uberwav

A Letter from our CEO on Improving Accessible Service (<https://ubr.to/uberwav>)

Page 31 - In the next Aspire Magazine, former CIL deputy director and disability rights activist Judith Heumann

In the spring edition of Aspire Magazine, TheCIL sits down with Judy Heumannm life-long activist and leader in the movements for disability rights, ahead of the release of her new book, *Being Heumann: An Unrepentant Memoir of a Disability Rights Activist*. The book follows Judy’s life from her childhood in Brooklyn until the present day.

Read her whole story, as told by Judy herself in *Being Heumann*, out February 25th, 2020.

Image: Cover of Judy’s book - a black and white image of Judy smirking at home overlayed with yellow text of the book’s title and author.

Page 32 - Back cover

Text: TheCIL’s Aspire Magazine at thecil.org/aspire

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