

Hi and welcome to the second episode of “That’s Inclusive!” My name is Pat Vincent-Piet. I will be your host today. I live here in New Hampshire with my husband, Jim Piet. We both have cerebral palsy. We’re both members of the New Hampshire Council on Developmental Disabilities.

I’d like to thank the Council for giving me the opportunity to host a couple of podcasts. Jim and I also have a YouTube channel where you can check us out. It’s “Jim and Pat”. Just J-I-M A-N-D Pat P-A-T on YouTube. We share a lot of our experiences living and working here in New Hampshire. Please check that out when you have a chance.

What is it like to live as a person with a disability here in the great state of New Hampshire? Well, there are several things that make it really wonderful place to live. First of all, it’s a very friendly state. Jim and I have lived in the same community here in Concord for well over 15 years now. We know most of our neighbors. Jim uses a wheelchair and it’s a power chair. It tends to get stuck sometimes, but he feels perfectly comfortable tooting around our large neighborhood by himself because we know so many people. Whenever he’d run into a problem, people are great at helping him out.

We also live in a very small state. While there aren’t many people here in our state – especially in certain areas- you get to know your neighbors because there just aren’t that many people to know.

It’s also a state where people tend to stay for a long time. As an adult I’ve mostly lived here in New Hampshire and Florida. Florida, while being a very physically accessible state - so you don’t run into the same problems with inaccessible restaurants or stores that you do here. I mean everything is pretty much physically accessible. It’s also a very transient state so people don’t stay in the same place for more than a couple of years, if that. The transientness of the state like Florida made it really hard to get to know your neighbors and find anybody to rely on. Even though it’s physically more accessible it’s not as friendly, in my opinion, to people with disabilities because you don’t connect with your neighbors for long.

Another great thing about living in New Hampshire for people with disabilities is the number of disability related organizations. We have New Hampshire Council on Developmental Disabilities and the other organizations where people with

disabilities can find support. Some, like Area Agencies provide direct services to people with disabilities and it's very easy to get in touch with them. When I first moved here from Florida, I didn't know anybody and I called- I called a few places. I think I started with the Disability Right Center, and I ended up just calling from place to place. I met a ton of people within a week just because they were - all the organizations were ready to help me. They were so interested in talking to me and it was really easy to make those connections. I haven't found that's the case in other states. Whether that's because the organizations don't work as well together or they're just so much larger. Having so many friendly disability- related organizations makes it so much easier for people with disabilities to live in New Hampshire.

But as many of you know who either have a disability or have a friend or a family member with a disability, there are a lot of things that make it hard for people with disabilities to live in New Hampshire.

One thing is the lack of accessible housing. If you need- particularly wheelchair accessible housing, there's not much. If you are fortunate enough to find something, you're staying put because there's just not an option to go anywhere- particularly for people with moderate incomes. A lot of our accessible housing is rental housing and a lot of it is in rent controlled housing- housing that's been built by the local public housing authority. Or has used Section 8 money to be built. It can only house people that fit certain income criteria. If you don't fit that income criteria, you then have to look for market rate housing. There's far less market rate housing that's accessible available to people with disabilities. Your choices are very limited. And if you want to visit friends or family- odds are that their- where they live is not accessible. Lack of accessible housing is an issue for people with disabilities in New Hampshire.

We also have a lack of public transportation. If you don't drive, you're pretty much stuck. We have some of our larger – some of our larger cities do have buses, but the schedules can be very limited. There's special transportation for people with disabilities but arranging those rides can be really hard to do. Our state is intended for people who can drive and get themselves from place to place, and if you can't, well, you're stuck.

We also have a lot of inaccessible public accommodations. Jim and I were walking around in Concord right before Christmas, and Concord is one of the more accessible towns in New Hampshire. But there are still a lot of businesses in downtown that are not accessible. They have steps at every entrance.

A friend of ours was performing in a show and didn't realize when they booked the space that it was upstairs somewhere. And there was no elevator. There are a lot of places in New Hampshire- a lot of stores, theaters, restaurants that are just simply not accessible for someone who's using a wheelchair.

One of the problems for people with disabilities who live in New Hampshire is the workforce shortage. If you need care to get up in the morning, to eat and do the daily things you need to do just to get out of the house and live your life – you need someone who can come in and help you do those things. Well, we don't have enough people. Last I knew, Granite State Independent Living (they employ personal care attendants for people with physical disabilities), they needed at least – at least- 400 people to be fully staffed. That means there's at least that many people out there going without the care they need just to live their lives.

And the last thing that can make things difficult for people with disabilities to live here in New Hampshire is ableism. Ableism specifically in our media. I do plan to have someone come on to talk about what ableism is and how to identify it, so I won't get into that today. Our one media (television) outlet, WMUR, is very ableist. The only shows that they have that feature people with disabilities, at least locally, are extremely ableist.

I plan to do several future podcasts. I'm going to do some interviews with other New Hampshire residents who have disabilities so they can talk about their experience. And I plan to bring on some professionals housing and direct care to talk about what are some of the specific barriers for people with disabilities living in New Hampshire, and how we can work together to bring down those barriers. And make this a much more accessible community for everyone.

Thanks for listening, and I'll talk to you next time.