

The person who I interviewed is a very interesting woman whom I will refer to as Becky to protect her identity. Becky is from the United States and moved around a lot as a child because her father was in the Air Force, but she spent much of her childhood and teenage years in Washington, D.C. She was married when she was 19 and moved to Knoxville, TN shortly thereafter. She is now divorced from her husband. She raised five children as a single mother. Becky is blind.

Becky's children are now grown and she currently reside in Chattanooga, TN. She is a social worker and works in a mental health treatment facility. She is also a potter and has her own pottery studio. After becoming blind after a brain surgery at age 19, Becky began going to the Services for the Blind's Vocational Rehab where she discovered her passion for pottery and began her endeavor to further her education.

Becky is an advocate for her culture of the physically disabled. She serves as Chairperson of the mayor's committee for disabilities to advocate for the disabled population of Chattanooga. She works with Services for the Blind and teaches art therapy classes for the blind. When she lived in Knoxville, she was a rehab teacher for the blind and went to people's homes to teach them daily living skills. She is also a member of the National Federation of the Blind. She is very active in her community to advocate and promote services for people with disabilities. For example, she will be attending a training session for all bus drivers in the state to promote awareness of the needs of people with disabilities who use public transportation.

Becky considers her most highly regarded value to be respect of all people regardless of their circumstances. According to her, having a disability has made her more aware of people's needs. She sees the physically disabled population as very strong and identifies a common strength of determination. She sees the disabled population as very capable, but she states that disabled people need support to make it. She is very independent and enjoys proving wrong people who doubt her. She used to give a talk called "Discouragement Only Encourages Me."

Becky sees society as more unjust for people with physical disabilities. She says that people simply don't think to include people with disabilities. As she puts it, including is different from accepting. People may be very accepting of people with disabilities, but often don't consider their needs, which leaves them excluded from many things others may take for granted.

Becky notices that she is treated differently from others because she is blind. She points out that when she is out with her white cane, people react to her with pity. When she is out with her service dog, people do not seem to know how to act around her or are afraid of her dog. She feels angry when people treat her differently. She says that most people with disabilities are open to answering questions and would prefer for people to ask questions rather than make assumptions. According to Becky, people erroneously view blind people in one of two ways. They are seen either as "super-blind" or as subordinate, with no middle ground that allows for a blind person to just be a "regular person."

When asked about the needs of the disabled population, Becky stated that she believes that all the necessary services exist, but they do need to be reinforced. She thinks that things have gotten much better than they used to be and that people's awareness and sensitivity are improving, but there is still a long way to go.

I very much enjoyed this interview. When first setting it up, I had no idea what to expect. I have had little exposure to the physically disabled population, and very limited exposure to the blind. I was very nervous going into the interview, but she was very warm and open. I quickly felt at ease. I did not want to offend my interviewee in any way. Because I know so little about this population, I urged Becky to let me know if I said anything offensive or culturally insensitive.

I learned a lot from this experience. I learned about many services offered for people with disabilities, particularly the blind, that I was not previously aware of. Some of these services include the Library of Congress's collection of audio books for people with vision impairment and a telephone newspaper service.

The information that I learned from Becky and the insight that she offered will stay with me and help me to be more knowledgeable when working with physically disabled people in the future. I feel that this experience contributed to a greater cultural competence for me and has made me more aware of some of the needs and challenges that this population faces.