



**Beyond
Limits**

Canada's Conference for
Diversity & Accessibility

October 27
2025

Connection and Belonging

8:30 - 10:15 am in the Main Room
Welcome and Opening Keynote: Al Condeluci

Breakout Sessions	Advocacy	Inclusion	Leadership	Accessibility
	Room 1	Room 2	Room 3	Room 4
Breakout 1 10:40-11:40am	Sherron Grant - Sawubona Africentric Circle of Support	Angela Taylor - Embracing Neurodiversity: Strengthening Connection and Inclusion	Philip Bialk - Who's Driving? Moving Beyond Tokenism Toward Authentic Leadership	Kelly Thibodeau - Demystifying Digital Accessibility
Breakout 2 1:00-2:00pm	Jessica Rotolo & Lauren Abela - The Power of "Yes": Advocacy, Friendship and Inclusion in Action	St.Amant Research Centre & Evaluation Office Panel - Advancing Inclusion through Research and Evaluation	Kristina Kircher - Connection & Belonging in the Workplace	Chelsea Champagne and Marife Cabaguio - Adapting the Skills System for Neurodivergent Youth
Breakout 3 2:20-3:20	Al Condeluci - The Power of Storytelling in Disability Advocacy	Anders Swanson - Doing it Together: What Dodging Frostbite and Avoiding SUVs can Teach us All	Corrie Melanson - Accessibility Confident Leadership	Shawna Joynt - The Broken Legacy

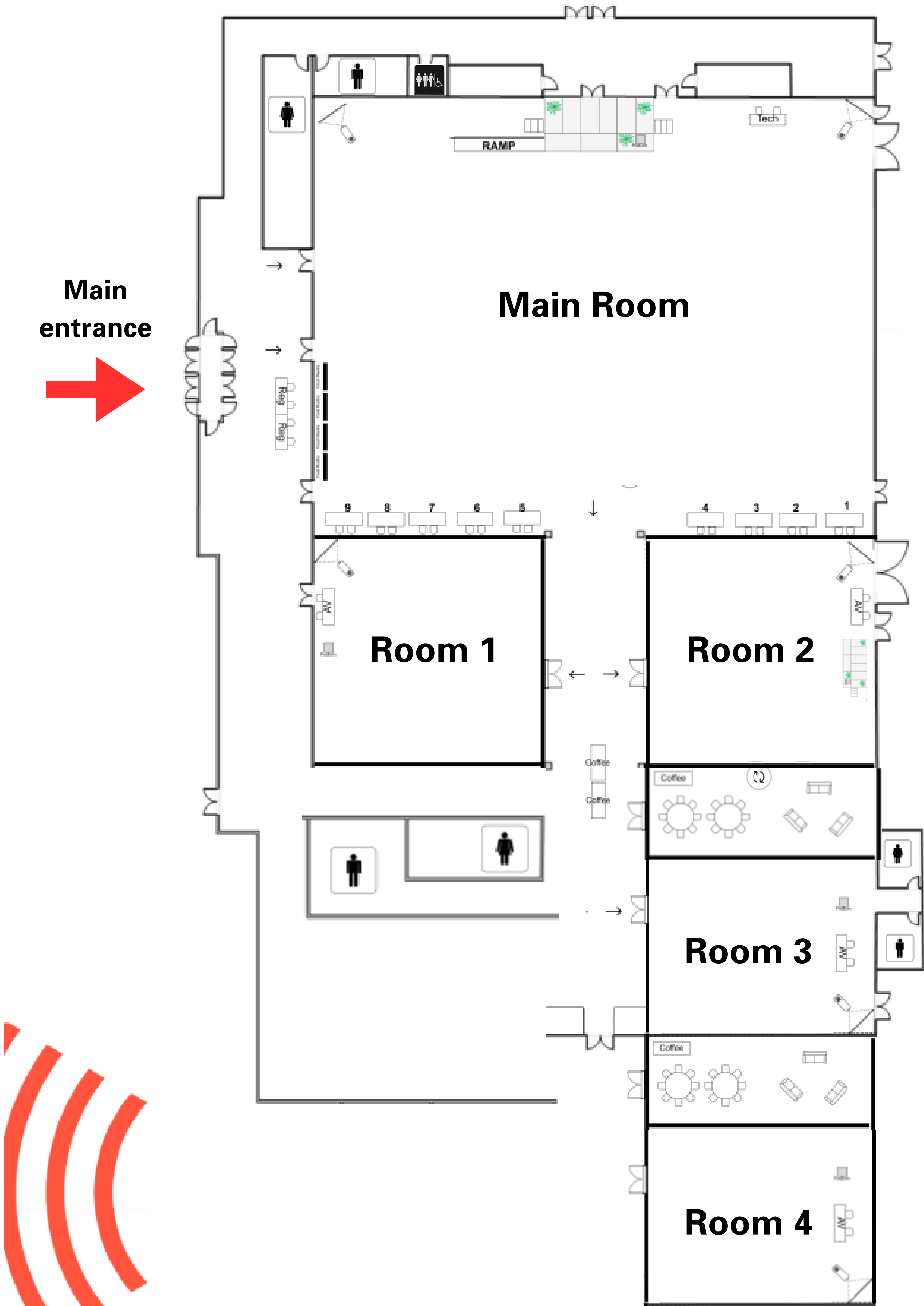
3:40 - 4:20 pm in the Main Room
Closing Keynote: Debbie Patterson, Sick & Twisted Theatre

Participants do not need to pre-register for breakout sessions.
Visit beyondlimitscanada.ca or scan the QR code to view a full
description of our presenters and their presentation topics.





Victoria Inn Hotel and Convention Centre Map





Beyond Limits

Canada's Conference for
Diversity & Accessibility

**Morning
Keynote
8:30 - 10:15am**

Al Condeluci

Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation: The Key to a Better Life

The notions of loneliness and social isolation have been clearly identified as vexing issues in our culture today, and since the pandemic, have seemingly exacerbated. We know that when people are rendered isolated, bad things can follow including adverse health issues, unhappiness/depression, challenges with life success, and even shortened life expectancy. We also know that all aspects of our lives are affected, our families, our social lives, as well as our work productivity.

This session will explore social isolation and loneliness. Not only will we look at the research and data related to this concept, but we will explore strategies, such as Positive Deviance approaches, and actions that can be employed in addressing loneliness by accessing social capital principles. In an interactive format, we will introduce the UCLA Loneliness Scale and examine ways and means to building more effective relationships.



Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will be introduced to recent data and research on isolation/loneliness
- The UCLA Loneliness scale, one way to measure loneliness will be introduced
- The construct of Positive Deviance will be overviewed
- Blue Zone strategies used to combat social isolation will be examined

Al Condeluci has been an advocate, a catalyst for building community capacities, and leader in understanding social culture since 1970. Born and raised in the steel town of Pittsburgh, PA, still making his home there, Al received his Bachelors Degree in Psychology from Youngstown State University, his Masters in Social Work and Ph.D. in Education from the University of Pittsburgh. Since 1970, he worked as an attendant, caseworker, advocate, planner, program director and finally, CEO of Community Living and Support Services (CLASS) until his retirement in late 2018. CLASS is dedicated to its mission – working toward a community where each belongs. CLASS, under the 47 years of Al's leadership, grew to become the third largest disability specific agency in Southwestern PA with a budget of \$16 million and a staff and payroll complement of 400. CLASS was listed in the 50 "Best Places to Work" in Allegheny County, PA in 2007 and 2011.





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**Advocacy
Breakout 1
10:40-11:40am**

Sherron Grant

"I See You": How to Increase Feelings of Belonging Amongst Racialized Families Caring for a Loved One with a Disability

Sherron Grant, Executive Director of Sawubona Africentric Circle of Support is an elementary school Principle and advocate for persons with disabilities. In this presentation Sherron will bring her personal and professional experience to support others to learn how to increase feelings of belonging amongst racialized families who are caring for a loved one with disabilities. Key takeaways include:

- Bridges we can form to fill the gap and take down barriers.
- Best practices to facilitate culturally relevant service navigation.
- Recognizing the systemic pitfalls that create barriers on the "Journey of Belonging" for the racialized community on the journey to inclusion and choice.



Sherron Grant, M.Ed. has been an educator for almost 20 years and an advocate for persons with disabilities for even longer. She is currently an elementary school Principal in the province of Ontario. Sherron feels blessed with the opportunity to empower and enlighten students, support teachers and partners with parents and community in support of the achievement and well-being of all learners that cross her path. Outside of school, Sherron supports families, has volunteered in several capacities on various Boards and committees in the disability sector and advocates for persons living with various disabilities; to be recognized for their valuable contributions to society and emphasizes the benefit we all experience when eliminating barriers for others. Sherron was the 2020 recipient of the Community Living Toronto Jim Turner Award for Outstanding Voluntarism. Sherron is also the recipient of a Humanitarian Service Award in 2021 and the Queen's Platinum Jubilee pin for her work in creating Sawubona Africentric Circle of Support, a safe space for Black parents/caregivers raising and caring for a loved one with a disability. In 2023, Sherron was recognized by Autism Ontario with The Gerry Bloomfield Volunteer Award which is presented to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to improving the quality of life for autistic people. And most recently, in 2025, Sherron is honoured to be receiving the 2025 EKO Tribute Award for Leadership in the disability sector! And yes, Sherron finds time to have fun as well. It often includes catching a good movie or streaming series, enjoying and exploring nature or hanging with her grandchildren.





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**Inclusion
Breakout 1
10:40-11:40am**

Angela Taylor

Embracing Neurodiversity: Strengthening Connection & Inclusion

True inclusion means creating environments where everyone feels valued, connected, and supported in ways that work for them. Neurodivergent individuals – including those with autism, ADHD, and other cognitive differences – often experience barriers to connection, communication, and participation in schools, workplaces, and community programs. This presentation will offer practical tools and strategies to help professionals, caregivers, and service providers increase meaningful inclusion, strengthen relationships, and create accessible spaces that support engagement and well-being.

Attendees will explore how to understand diverse communication styles, reduce stressors that limit participation, and build structured, supportive environments that promote social connection. The session will include real-life examples, interactive discussions, and take-home resources to help participants apply these strategies in education, disability services, mental health, and community-based programs.

Whether you are an educator, caregiver, or community leader, this presentation will equip you with clear, practical approaches to help neurodivergent individuals feel safe, included, and valued in all aspects of life.



Angela Taylor is a mental health and accessibility expert with over 25 years of experience supporting diverse individuals and families. Specializing in neurodiversity—including ADHD, autism, cognitive differences, trauma, and mental health conditions—she is deeply committed to fostering inclusion and understanding. As a multiply neurodivergent individual who experienced care through the foster system and is a mother to neurospicy children, Angela brings both professional expertise and lived experience to her work.

She is the author of five books, including *Embracing Neurodiversity*, and is widely recognized as an advocate and innovator in the fields of neurodiversity, disability, and mental health. Her work focuses on increasing inclusion across communities, working with caregivers, professionals, and individuals of all ages to create more supportive environments. Angela is a PhD candidate focusing on how the neurodivergent community defines meaningful care. She holds a Post-Baccalaureate in Education specializing in counseling and inclusion, as well as a Master's in Disability Studies. She is the founder of Inspire Community Outreach, a registered Canadian charity, and Supporting Community Together, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting meaningful inclusion across Canada and beyond. Through clinical consultation, training, and community-based.





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**Leadership
Breakout 1
10:40-11:40am**

Philip Bialk

Who's Driving? Moving Beyond Tokenism Toward Authentic Leadership

Too often in the disability sector, people with disabilities are placed in the passenger seat while others make decisions for them. This presentation, led by Philip Bialk – Chair of the St. Amant Self-Advocate Committee – challenges that norm by promoting a vision of authentic leadership that centers the voices, choices, and experiences of people with disabilities.

The term person-centered has become a buzzword – used frequently but often disconnected from practice. In many cases, services remain system-driven, and the voices of people with disabilities are included in name only. This presentation will ground participants in the true meaning of person-led supports, where leadership starts with the person and support is built around their direction – not the other way around.

Using the metaphor of a road trip, Philip will explore the roles people play in supporting others. People with disabilities must be in the driver's seat of their own lives – steering the direction, making the decisions, and choosing the destination. Support staff, families and systems can act as navigators – offering guidance when asked- but should never become backseat drivers or, worse, take the wheel entirely. This happens all too often and undermines the autonomy, dignity, and wisdom of those with lived experience.

Authentic leadership means making space at every table for people with disabilities, not as tokens, but as true experts and co-creators. This session will empower participants to rethink power, avoid tokenism, and move toward genuine inclusion driven by the people most affected.



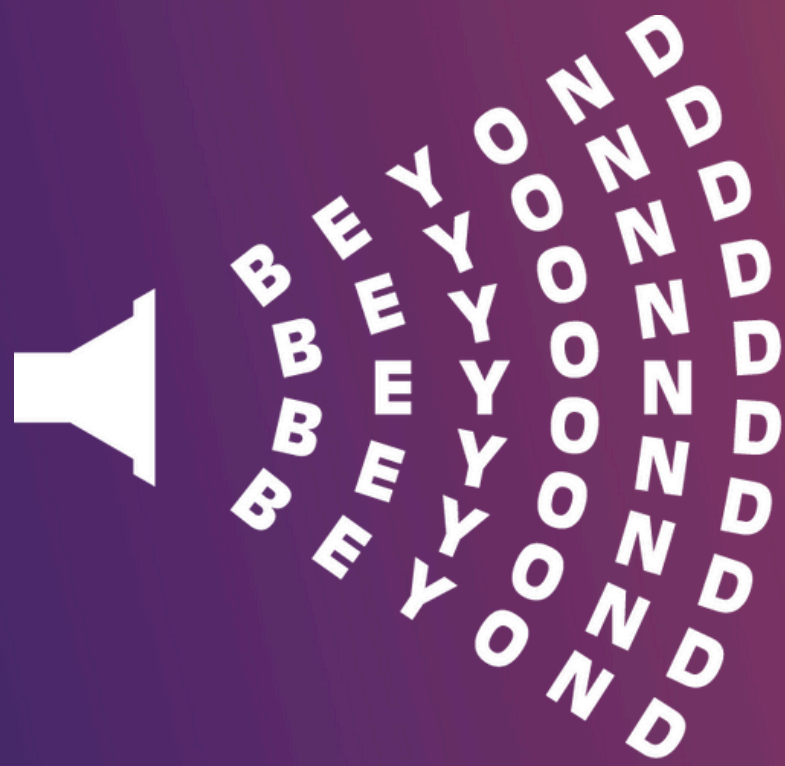
Philip is the Chair of the St. Amant Self-Advocate Committee, a group led by and for people with disabilities that champions choice and inclusion. In this role, he helps lead conversations that ensure the voices of people with lived experience are heard, valued, and acted on.

He is a key contributor to the Empower YOU rights training series, which supports people in understanding their rights and stepping confidently into full citizenship. Philip is also part of a working group creating a new accessible rights training website, designed by self-advocates for self-advocates.

An experienced public speaker, Philip has shared his voice at events including Special Olympics Canada and other gatherings that celebrate inclusion and self-advocacy.

Outside of advocacy, Philip is a proud Winnipegger and sports enthusiast. He recently moved into a new home, a milestone that reflects his commitment to independence, his ability to make empowered choices, and his passion for inspiring others to do the same.





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**Accessibility
Breakout 1
10:40- 11:40am**

Kelly Thibodeau

Demystifying Digital Accessibility

In this session, participants will learn what digital accessibility is and why it matters. 1 in 3 Manitobans and 1 in 4 Canadians identify as having a disability. Worldwide, it's more than 16% of the world's population, or 1.3 billion people. You don't need a big team or a big budget to make a big impact. There is a clear connection between accessibility and meaningful, measurable business outcomes.

Get ready to dig in, engage and start thinking differently in this highly interactive and fun session.

During the session, we'll cover:

- The principles of digital accessibility – what it is and what it means
- How audiences with different needs benefit from accessible communications, including people who are neurodiverse, people who have visual disabilities and people with Parkinson's, ALS or other neuromuscular conditions
- How to write accessible content, including implications for videos, graphics and visuals, and where AI fits into the workflow

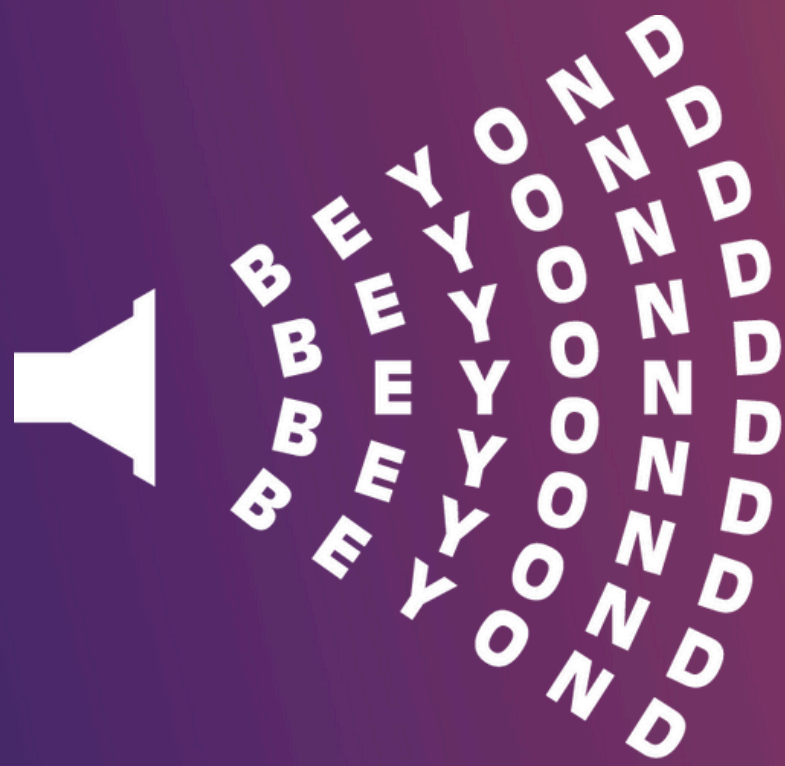


Kelly Thibodeau is a consultant, trainer and speaker who's been making online marketing make sense for organizations, nonprofits and industry groups for over 25 years. She's the Founder and President of Squarely Accessible.

Kelly's lived experience as the daughter of a disabled mom is the driving force behind her passion for accessible marketing and communications. She's on a mission to humanize accessibility and bust through the myth that it's boring, technical and complicated. She's combined her background in user-centred design with her expertise in digital accessibility to launch bespoke courses to over 150 professionals from across Canada and around the world.

She's a Board member with Level It Up, a nonprofit dedicated to finding meaningful work for people on the autism spectrum and she's on the National Advisory Committee for Partners for Planning, a nonprofit that empowers people with disabilities and their families to create meaningful lives and secure futures, firmly rooted in community.





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**Advocacy
Breakout 2**
1:00 - 2:00pm

Jessica Rotolo & Lauren Abela

The Power of “Yes”: Advocacy, Friendship & Inclusion in Action

Get ready for an engaging and heartwarming session that blends storytelling with interactive activities by two passionate presenters. Jessica Rotolo (who was born with Down syndrome) and Lauren Abela (her sister from another mister, LOL) are fierce advocates and Global Ambassadors for Best Buddies. They will take you on a journey through their story of friendship with the help of a creative twist on a beloved Taylor Swift song, moving visuals, and fun opportunities for engagement with your peers. You can expect to receive practical tools like drama-based exercises that build confidence, fosters connection and encourages self-advocacy. We hope you will leave feeling inspired and empowered to work with organizations like Best Buddies Canada, DramaWay and the Canadian Down Syndrome Society (CDSS), but also equipped to uplift others within your networks. This is more than a session—it's a call to say “yes” to inclusion. So, will you join us?”

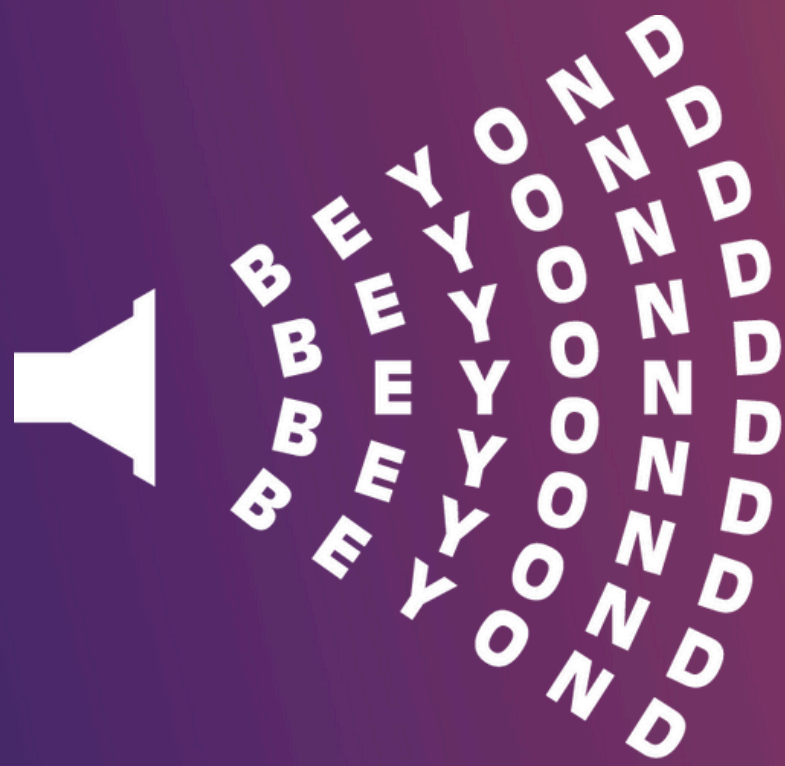


Jessica is a global ambassador, public speaker, and advocate for the Down Syndrome community. She's partnered with Best Buddies International, the Canadian Down Syndrome Society, and Addidas on inclusive initiatives, raising nearly \$100,000 through a global sock campaign. Her work has earned national recognition, and she recently completed a documentary on living with Alopecia Areata, set to debut in 2025. As Jessica says, “I am a young woman who is Rockin’ Life.”

Lauren is a disability inclusion advocate, educator, and one of Canada's first Global Ambassadors for Best Buddies International. A decorated Psychology graduate from the University of Guelph-Humber, she co-led major awareness campaigns and co-founded her campus's first best Buddies chapter. She currently supports adult learners at Humber Polytechnic and continues to champion inclusive education and community

See Jessica and Lauren's full bio [here](#).





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**Inclusion
Breakout 2
1:00 - 2:00pm**

St.Amant Research Centre & Evaluation Office Panel

Advancing Inclusion through Research and Evaluation

Persons with disabilities face many barriers to full participation in their communities. Barriers include physical obstacles, social challenges such as stigma, and policies that prevent access to services such as employment and recreation. In this panel we will discuss how research and evaluation can help reduce these barriers and how involving persons with disabilities in research and evaluation enriches research projects. We will provide examples of community-based participatory research and strengths-based approaches. Our aim is to foster open discussion about how research and evaluation contribute to inclusion and how involving persons with disabilities in research and evaluation is both possible and important. Our panel includes senior researchers and an evaluator from St.Amant Research Centre.



Madeline Burghardt (she/her) is Assistant Professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy in the College of Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Manitoba. She holds a doctorate in Critical Disability Studies from York University and is the author of *Broken: Institutions, Families, and the Construction of Intellectual Disability*, published by McGill-Queen's University Press. Her work explores the ways in which geopolitical and historical phenomena produce impairment and disability and how their effects are experienced individually and communally. She has worked extensively with people labelled with intellectual disabilities in professional and artistic capacities, particularly concerning their experiences of institutionalization. Her current projects include an exploration of caregivers' experiences of respite care in Manitoba; participation in an arts-based spiritual care project based at St.Amant; and a collaborative reconciliatory justice initiative with institutional survivors who are re-claiming institutional artifacts in their journeys of healing.

Toby Martin is an Associate Professor in the Psychology Department at the University of Manitoba, and a Senior Researcher at St.Amant Research Centre. His academic training focused on experimental behaviour analysis and research design. He is keenly interested in ethical, conceptual, and philosophical issues in behavioural psychology. His research interests today include autism, developmental disabilities, knowledge translation, and mindfulness.





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**Inclusion
Breakout 2
1:00 - 2:00pm**

St.Amant Research Centre & Evaluation Office Panel

Bekelu Negash, is an Evaluator at St.Amant Research Centre, Evaluation Office. She obtained her Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience from the University of Winnipeg, and a Master of Science from the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba. She has experience in conducting qualitative research including community-based participatory research and mixed methods evaluation research. Her previous Research Coordinator and Research Assistant positions have afforded her the privilege of engaging with diverse communities. Moreover, through her previous roles as a Support Worker at St.Amant's Community Residential Program, she has experience working with individuals with developmental disabilities. Bekelu is passionate about using research and evaluation to advocate for high-quality service and programs for people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism, and acquired brain injuries.



Dr. Shahin Shooshtari is a professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba and a senior researcher at St. Amant Research Centre. Dr. Shooshtari's interdisciplinary research program focuses on the health and well-being of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). She mentors both graduate and undergraduate students and has published extensively with her colleagues and trainees on health and aging-related issues concerning individuals with IDD. In recognition of her excellence in teaching, research, and service, Dr. Shooshtari has received numerous awards from the University of Manitoba as well as from national and international associations.





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**Leadership
Breakout 2**
1:00 - 2:00pm

Kristina Kircher

Connection & Belonging in the Workplace: Building a Multi-Pronged Approach to Workplace Culture and Engagement

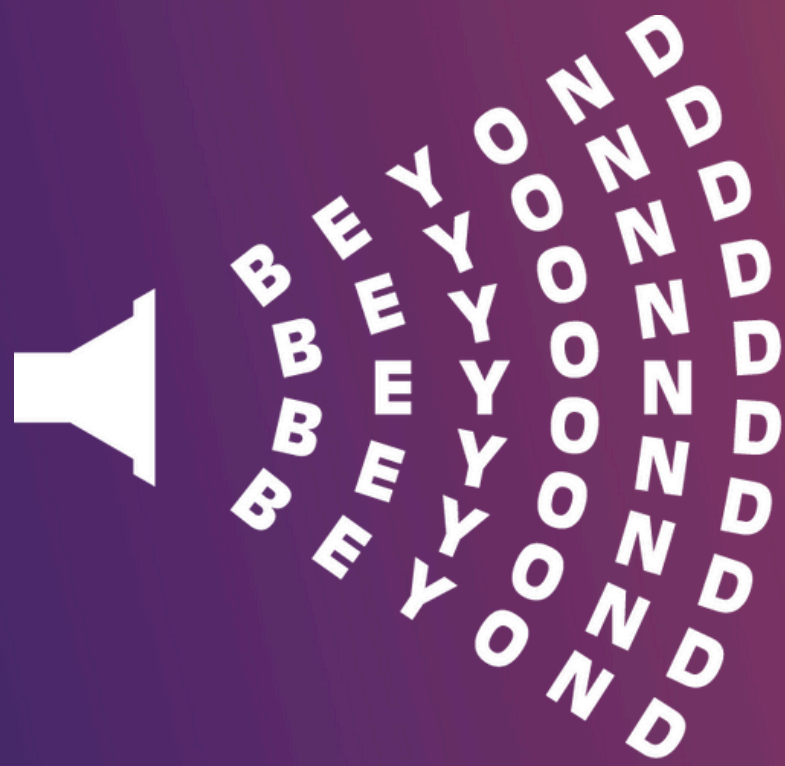
True workplace engagement goes far beyond surface-level perks. It's about cultivating a culture where every employee feels seen, valued, and included. In this session, we will explore how to foster genuine connection and belonging by shifting from performative efforts to a purpose-driven, multi-pronged approach that embeds inclusion into the fabric of organizational culture. Participants will gain a clearer understanding of what meaningful engagement looks like and why it's critical for employee well-being, team cohesion, and organizational success. We'll examine how inclusive practices can bridge engagement gaps and promote psychological safety. Drawing from both research and practical experience in disability inclusion, attendees will learn actionable strategies to ensure that their colleagues not only feel welcome, but are empowered to participate fully and meaningfully in their work environments. With the knowledge that 1 in 5 youth and 1 in 4 adults identify as having one or more disabilities, it is essential that we are intentional about building inclusive spaces.

Whether you're a leader, frontline worker, or advocate, this workshop equips you with the tools to build stronger, more inclusive teams and foster workplaces rooted in equity, connection, and respect.



Kristina Kircher has been working in the education and training field for over 20 years with over seven of those spent managing Corporate Learning & Development teams. Through her current role with Bison, she leads the development of leadership programs, various training curriculums, and is involved in numerous cross departmental projects. In addition, she is heavily involved in committee work including DEI, employee recognition, accessibility, charitable giving, and social committee. Kristina is an experienced facilitator, having led strategic planning sessions, corporate training, leadership summits, and conference presentations. She is dedicated to enriching the employee experience and happily jumps into projects that enhance workplace culture. "We spend so much of our time at work, I want people to enjoy it! We can have fun and produce excellent work at the same time." Outside of work, Kristina is deeply interested in fitness, nutrition, and exercising her mind. She enjoys spending her time camping and hiking with her 3 kids or engrossed in a book.





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**Accessibility
Breakout 2
1:00 - 2:00pm**

Chelsea Champagne and Marife Cabaguio

Adapting the Skills System for Neurodivergent Youth

The Intensive Community Reintegration Service (ICRS) of Manitoba's Shared Health Child and Youth Treatment Services is a service for neurodivergent youth (10-17) who are having difficulties in their community school. ICRS is a mental health day-program service that includes skills-based treatment, parent/caregiver support, onsite schooling, and transition services back to a youth's community school. Youth attend ICRS full-time for six months.

In the fall of 2024, ICRS began to use the Skills System©, a DBT informed system created by Dr. Julie F. Brown to teach youth how to use the Skills System© for regulation and problem solving across environments. This workshop will provide an overview of the ICRS program and of how ICRS staff have adapted the Skills System© to meet the needs for a full-time day program that is repeated multiple times during youth's attendance at ICRS and upon their return to their community school.

Participants in this workshop will be given an opportunity to understand the basics of the Skills System© and apply the information to their own programming. They will recognize that within a mental health program, dysregulation can be addressed in a deliberate, trauma-informed, and concrete manner.



Chelsea Champagne is an Adolescent Mental Health Counsellor with 12 years at the Intensive Community Reintegration Service (Child and Youth Treatment Services, formerly MATC) under Shared Health. A Child and Youth Care Diploma graduate, she has 15 years' experience supporting children, youth, and families across mental health, addictions, recreation, and justice. Chelsea is President of the Child and Youth Care Workers' Association of Manitoba and Treasurer of FICE-Canada.

Marife Cabaguio, MOT, brings years of experience working with neurodivergent children and youth as an Occupational Therapist since 2017. She currently practices within Shared Health Manitoba's Child and Youth Treatment Services, where she is a dedicated team member of the Intensive Community Reintegration Service. Marife is passionate about helping children and youth achieve their full potential through client-centered, evidence-based occupational therapy.





Beyond Limits

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**Advocacy
Breakout 3
2:20 - 3:20pm**

Al Condeluci

The Power of Storytelling in Disability Advocacy

Storytelling is a powerful way to challenge stereotypes, build empathy, and promote inclusion for people with disabilities. This session will explore how authentic personal stories can drive change in communities, classrooms, and policy. Ideal for educators, those working with children and adults, participants will gain tools to use storytelling as a means to support self-advocacy and foster understanding.

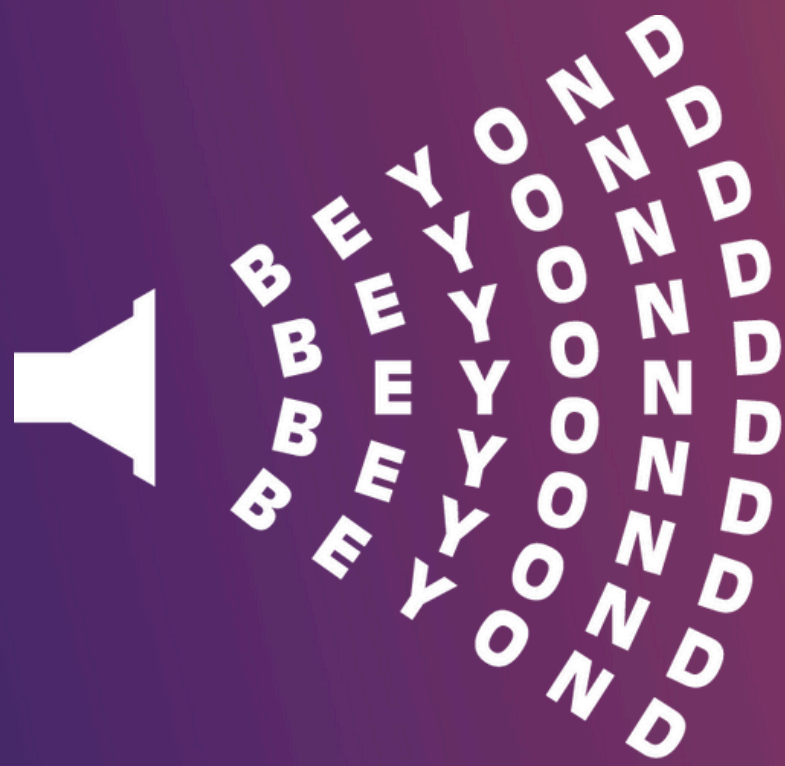
Key Learning Objectives:

- Understand why storytelling is effective in disability advocacy
- Learn how stories can challenge stigma and inspire inclusion
- Discover ways to support children and youth in telling their own stories



Al Condeluci has been an advocate, a catalyst for building community capacities, and leader in understanding social culture since 1970. Born and raised in the steel town of Pittsburgh, PA, still making his home there, Al received his Bachelors Degree in Psychology from Youngstown State University, his Masters in Social Work and Ph.D. in Education from the University of Pittsburgh. Since 1970, he worked as an attendant, caseworker, advocate, planner, program director and finally, CEO of Community Living and Support Services (CLASS) until his retirement in late 2018. CLASS is dedicated to its mission – working toward a community where each belongs. CLASS, under the 47 years of Al's leadership, grew to become the third largest disability specific agency in Southwestern PA with a budget of \$16 million and a staff and payroll complement of 400. CLASS was listed in the 50 "Best Places to Work" in Allegheny County, PA in 2007 and 2011.





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**Inclusion
Breakout 3
2:20 - 3:20pm**

Anders Swanson

Doing it Together: What Dodging Frostbite and SUV can Teach Us All About the Present and the Future

In the world of recreation and transportation, people love to use the words “all ages and abilities” to describe the outcome and the reality of a not too distant future. This is a story about Winnipeg Trails and as an organization full of diversity of both activities and people what we’ve learned along the way by actually trying to make inclusive “stuff” happen - both for one off events and for the world around us.

We’ll talk about our work in the community focusing on the period between 2017-2025 . We’ll share practical details about getting things like logistics and attitudes. We’ll talk about friendship, the leadership of our team members who are part of the disability community, and what “inclusive” looks like in real life. We’ll talk about the struggle and determination to host events and activities that can be seen as challenging “even” for athletic and able-bodied folk - and to create ones that also work for a large spectrum of people who live with realities ranging from spinal injuries to neurodivergence to vision impairment. We’ll talk about doing this outside in the freezing cold too - about our WinterPeg project and what striving for accessibility means when no one can see the sidewalk and getting stuck in the cold can mean death. We’ll talk about winter and summer, about bicycles, skis and everything in between. We’ll talk about the concept of safety “3rd”, the big grey zone of what “abled” is and what it should mean for us, about the march of time, the nature of human bodies in movement and what we can all learn from others when we try to do things together.



Anders Swanson is a multimedia artist and a lover of nature. For the last 15 years or so, he has dedicated his life to collaborating with people much smarter to advance sustainable transportation and placemaking. His skills include non-profit management, community organizing, treeplanting, bike mechanics, and design; he is very pleased that he still gets to do a little bit of all of those things in his current role of Executive Director of Winnipeg Trails. Over the years, he found an important niche thanks to a penchant for listening to youth, empathy for people in positions of power, a knack for communicating with the public and he likes to use mapping, design, and volunteerism to advance international, national and local policies that make us/the environment healthier and happier. As a longtime volunteer working at the grassroots and as a political advocate, he has been involved in many initiatives in his home of Winnipeg, Canada and across the globe. He is the past-chair of Canada’s national transportation cycling organization Vélo Canada Bikes, the current Secretary of the International Winter Cycling Federation and a proud co-founder of a number of plucky little organizations in his hometown.





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**Leadership
Breakout 3
2:20 - 3:20pm**

Corrie Melanson

Accessibility Confident Leadership

Employees with disabilities face barriers to meaningful employment and sometimes do not feel safe or included in workplace environments, including the public service. This interactive workshop for leaders builds confidence and competence in providing inclusive leadership and support to employees with disabilities.



In this workshop you will:

- Outline an accessibility continuum – from proactive to responsive.
- Define ableism and impacts on employees with disabilities.
- Practice creating safer spaces: proactive and responsive accommodations and sharing information about a disability.
- Explore individual, interpersonal, and structural accessibility actions.

Corrie Melanson (she/they) is an experienced process facilitator, trainer, and learning designer based in Kijipuktuk (Halifax), NS. They are a white, queer, able-bodied, neurodivergent settler. Corrie is deeply puzzled by why and how we seem to value profit over people and why and how we base our belonging on who we can keep out rather than who we welcome in. She is deeply moved by how so many of us do all in our power to engage in solidarity efforts to live into the world we all want and deserve.





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**Accessibility
Breakout 3
2:20 - 3:20pm**

Shawna Joynt

A Broken Legacy

Shawna Joynt, a proud Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Han Nation woman and member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, shares her compelling personal story in *A Broken Legacy*. From a childhood marked by adversity to raising children as a single mother and becoming a national leader, Shawna has faced and overcome countless barriers.

Today, she serves in leadership roles across Canada, advocating for accessibility and equity for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Indigenous communities. With determination, kindness, respectfulness and her desire to become a "listener and healer", Shawna invites audiences into her journey of survival, healing, and transformation—offering a message of hope, connection, and the power of collective change.



Shawna Joynt is a First Nations woman who is hard of hearing from the TR'ONDEK HWECHIN HAN NATION tribe in Dawson City, Yukon. She is known for her strong will, determination, kindness, respectfulness, and her desire to become a "listener and healer." Creating safe spaces and showing respect are especially important to her. She strongly believes in teamwork. Shawna is currently on several boards, and her passion is to help remove barriers for Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Indigenous people. Shawna acts as President of Canadian Association for the Deaf (CAD/ASC); President of the Manitoba Deaf Association (MDA); Director on the Board of the Canadian Deaf Sports Association (CDSA); and President of the Manitoba Deaf Sports Association (MDSA), along with several roles on variety of committees. Shawna believes we all will work together and make sure everyone has equal rights –with time and work, we will get to that point!

Shawna communicates using American Sign Language and works as an ASL translator for several national and provincial non-profit organizations. She also teaches ASL in various locations across northern Canada, privately teaching for over 10 years provincially.

Currently, Shawna is learning French/LSQ, International Signs, Inuit/Ojibway and Pisiel/Inuit Signs. She believes in learning other languages to foster better relations for future connections. Her goal is to remove barriers and increase vision education to enhance knowledge. Shawna is a member of Manitoba's Accessibility Advisory Council, serving on a three-year contract.

In her free time, Shawna loves to spend time with her family and her pets. Tending to her plants and gardening helps her mind feel at ease. She also enjoys reading novels, writing her book, and creating cultural crafts, making sure to make time for these activities. Thanks/Merci/Miigwech





**Beyond
Limits**

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Closing Keynote

3:40 - 4:20pm

Debbie Patterson and the Sick & Twisted Choir

Reimagining Disability in Theatre: Storytelling, Representation, and Artistic Excellence

After two decades as a professional performer, I was diagnosed with MS and suddenly found myself navigating a world where disabled artists were nearly invisible. That experience led me to create a disability-led theatre company—one that not only makes space for disabled performers but also challenges the stories we tell about disability.

This presentation, led by Debbie Patterson, will explore how disability is often erased or misrepresented in theatre and media, and why it's vital to centre disabled voices in our cultural storytelling. We'll also feature a short performance by the Sick + Twisted Theatre Choir, offering a powerful example of what inclusive, disability-led artistry looks and sounds like.

What You'll Take Away:

- A better understanding of how disability is typically portrayed in theatre, and why that needs to change.
- Insight into how storytelling shapes our beliefs about disability, and how those beliefs impact real lives.
- Real-world examples of how disabled artists like Niall McNeil are creating bold, original work.
- Ideas for how to support and collaborate with disabled artists in meaningful, respectful ways.
- Inspiration to imagine a more inclusive future for the arts, one where everyone's story matters.



Debbie Patterson is a Winnipeg-based actor, playwright, director, and dramaturge. She is the founding artistic director of Sick + Twisted Theatre, a company dedicated to creating work through the lens of disability. A co-founder of Shakespeare in the Ruins, Debbie has spent over three decades shaping Manitoba's theatre landscape through performance, leadership, and community engagement.

Her groundbreaking work includes becoming the first disabled actor to play Richard III professionally in Canada, and creating *Sargent & Victor & Me*, a solo show exploring her MS diagnosis. She's collaborated with major companies across Canada, including Prairie Theatre Exchange, Stratford Festival, and Theatre Passe Muraille, and is a sought-after consultant on Crip Aesthetics and accessibility in the arts.

Debbie's accolades include the United Nations Activist Award, the Winnipeg Arts Council's Making a Mark Award, and the King Charles III Coronation Medal. She continues to lead nationally recognized projects while mentoring emerging artists and advocating for disability justice in the arts.

