



Episode 2: Getting Active: The Ruderman Foundation

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Audio commercial: Rachel Mullins

Hey there, it's Rachel Mullins the host of hashtag. No Filter Friday on Public House media.

[Upbeat intro music] Disarming Disability

Sarah:

Okay. So here we are. Welcome back. This is our first episode of the Season. We're really excited that you're here. And so yeah, we've got really awesome experts for this chapter. But let's also adjust the reality of the world that we're living in right now. So COVID-19 is real. I know that all of us are sort of and we're sort of in the thick of it - We've been in this for what two months maybe like a month and a half now at this point sort of around there. Definitely too long but also sort of like not long enough, but I know all of our lives are completely disrupted.

Nicole:

What has your life looked like? What is what is COVID done in your world?

Sarah:

In my world personally, everything has stopped. So I took a leave from the airline. So I will not be working for American Airlines for the next year. I come back in 2021 sort of depending on what life looks like when things were really sort of coming out in early March it was really sort of startling to see that flight loads were, you know maxed out like this is airplanes that I work typically hold like a 187 people, right? That's like an Airbus 321 holds maybe about that many people. We have a couple of different configurations, but then should just watch how the numbers were dropping hour-by-hour like I would be able to sort of track my flights and a flight that I was supposed to work, but then for whatever reasons didn't work, it went out with like 20 people on it.

And that's nothing I've ever seen in my lifetime. I know a lot of flight attendant sort of speak that this is the world that sort of existed in post 9/11. So just as the COVID was beginning and they were starting to offer these leaves because routes were like canceling people were, you know, not filling those seats and trying to reschedule I get money back. I was like, okay, like this could really be a good space for me to get an Occupational Therapy job since I just graduated.

I just got my license on March 3rd, so So I was really excited to be able to practice OT so it's like okay, I think I'll be fine because I have another job that I can go to where that may not necessarily be the same story that every other flight attendant has right? So and then just as that's which happened things got pretty ramped up with COVID and then everything's frozen right? So there's no I applied to all seven occupational therapy jobs in the Greater Philadelphia area. Maybe I'll get what I don't know. Um, so everything is just kind of frozen.

I also just before COVID had started I had abstract accepted to be presenting it different conferences around aerial arts and disability and limb differences. I had different presentations. I had I was we had a workshop that we were going to do like and some of these things started being paid. So it just like was really exciting for my own life to be like, okay like this sort of alternative lifestyle in an advocacy and speaking and presenting and sort of continuing research was really starting to get amped up. I was going to do a performance with Erin Ball and Guadalajara for the aerial arts, which is like super excited. And again these being like paid things and then sort of COVID has just canceled my life.

So I'm in sort of this like funky space where I am applying for unemployment and sort of like, okay, so I'm just like flight attendant with a graduate degree. That unemployed was like, "okay, Sarah. Like great life decisions you did." So that is me unemployed flight attendant with the graduate degree. Heyy!

Nicole:

But I feel you and it's not just you. I mean my company, I initially also was furloughed and so I also was a unemployed person with a graduate degree my company just they got the small business loan that the government is offering. So now I've been trying to figure out how to get off unemployment which by the way is just as hard as trying to get on unemployment.

But it's I'm just hoping that the good the good that will come out of it that this this craziness that we're in right now are the things exactly like what we're talking about where you know, we can working from home can be more normal life if that's an accommodation that somebody needs but yeah.

I'm really excited now to jump into today's guest. We actually this guest reached out his team, I guess, they reached out to us and he totally freaked out when they reached out to us because this person Jay Ruderman is our guest today and Jay runs a family foundation called the Ruderman Foundation. And they do so much amazing activism within the disability space and just to have the chance to be able to pick the brain of somebody who has not only the resources of money, but also the resources of people and of influence to talk, to talk about the ways and the thought process of how you go through that and what you do was so cool. And he just was a Jay, I mean, I don't care. He's just the most intelligent guy who totally totally gets it right? He gets disability. He gets where the gaps are and he is actively working to fill these gaps. Yeah, so we are just so honored and so excited to jump into this interview and have you join the amazing conversation we have with expert Jay Ruderman.

Nicole:

Jay Ruderman is the president of the Ruderman Family Foundation which focuses on the inclusion of people with disabilities worldwide and educating Israeli leaders on the American Jewish Community. Jay graduated from Boston University with honors and received his JD from Boston University School of Law. He lives in Boston with his wife and their four children. For Jay's full bio, please check out our website at disarmingdisability.com.

Nicole:

Welcome Jay. We talked about it a little bit before but can you give us a little taste of what Boston is like during this pandemic time?

Jay:

Yeah. So Boston is an epicenter of COVID-19 is a lot of cases here. I mean, we're not in the situation of New York, but we are in the midst of the surge. People are locked down. We just got a notice from the Commonwealth that we're locked down until pretty much the end of May. Our kids are out of school for the rest of the year. You know, it's a serious situation, but people still go about their lives. Most people are working from home, those that can work from home.

But of course, you know, we rely on our First Responders that doctors under this is police officers and so forth and the people who are in our supermarkets, so there's a lot of people that can't work from home. But you know, we're trying to stay safe and you know, people, most people I see out in the and about walking around our following precautions wearing masks and keeping social distancing. So we're sort of in the midst of it.

Nicole:

Yeah, that's how it feels here in Chicago to I just it's been strange in a matter of weeks that you know one time a week. I go grocery shopping the first time it was shocking to see someone in a mask and now here just two or three weeks later, it's shocking to see someone without a mask. That's just been such a strange turn but we're all in this together and I'm glad that you are, yes, staying safe and that it sounds like everyone is well.

Jay:

Thank you.

Nicole:

Yeah. So let's hop right in. I'm wondering if you can give us a little bit of history on on you. What is your career look like and how have you come to the place that you're in today?

Jay:

Well, I'm a Bostonian I grew up here went to college local school at Brandeis University and I went to Boston University Law School. I used to be an assistant district attorney. But I've always been involved in politics and activism and I've always believed, in activism as a way to change society. When I took over running the foundation, foundations about two decades old, but I've been involved for about 10 or 12 years and I sort of took it from a philanthropic organization, which we still are, into a combination of a philanthropic organization- but also we do a lot of advocacy.

Our advocacy started by responding to stories of celebrities and politicians films and movies in which people with disabilities were portrayed or you know spoken about a derogatory terms to actually putting out over a dozen white papers dealing with a lot of different subjects on disability. And we're still very outspoken.

And I think one of the things you know Family Foundation for those that aren't familiar, is the government allows families to put a certain amount of wealth aside and to distribute that for the public benefit to public charities, but we have a great deal of latitude. And I, one of the things that I think allows us to be really good and advocacy is we don't have a lot of bureaucracy so we can and within a matter of hours, and we work a lot with the media. Social media, but also traditional media.

Sarah:

That's fantastic! I really when I was looking through the the Ruderman Family Foundation website. I came across those white papers. And I know that Nikki and I spoke we had Lawrence Carter-Long on our podcast the first season that spoke specifically about this study that was conducted researching films from 2007 to 2015. And so I kept thinking like, okay. So what's happening now, like what growth has happened between 2015 to 2020? So when I came across those white papers, I was like, wow, this is one that's coming out every year that's looking at you know, how have things changed within our TV shows and things like that. So I got really excited because it really is so thank you, for for continuing on that research because it is really important to see who is still not being represented.

Jay:

Right. And Lawrence is great. He and David Perry actually wrote our first white paper, which was on police brutality. And that half of the people that are killed by police officers have a disability and often that disability is not portrayed in the media as part of the conversation. Regarding Hollywood, we've done three white papers have been extremely involved in Hollywood for the past few years actually until COVID-19 hit about authentic representation of people with disabilities and first white paper, which was done.

One of the author's is Danny Woodburn who is a little person. And probably best known for a recurring role on Seinfeld, but he's been in many movies and TV shows but the first white paper said that 95% of the people that you see on TV and the leading shows are played by able-bodied characters.

Their had there has been some progress. I mean, we've been very outspoken about films in which disabilities portrayed by able-bodied actors and you know you think about- like why this is important? Well, stigma is prevalent in our society and before COVID-19 hit, you know, we have the lowest unemployment in history of the United

States we had about under 4% unemployment. The people with disabilities were still unemployed at the rate of 70% and a lot of that has to do with stigma.

The thing about TV and film, you know, Michelle Obama once said that most of us get to know people who are not like ourselves because we see them in TV and film. And so more you have authentic very portrayal of people with disabilities in film and TV the more they become part of our lives and more normalized and I also realized generational thing happening where younger people who may have gone to school with people with disabilities are more used to it and it's like not a big deal to have diversity in their society whereas older generations or more -- you know, I guess they would say not as comfortable with it.

And when we really dug in and dealt with a lot of the studio's, I think there is a perception that people with disabilities can't really authentically portray disability. But you know, we used to have that attitude with African-Americans and Hispanic and American Indians and that has really changed very quickly in Hollywood. So, you know, we've worked with the Oscars, we worked with Sundance Film Institute some of the leading actors and studios we've made, you know, great deal of progress, but there's still a lot of progress to be made.

Sarah:

I have a silly sort of comment to know this weekend. I happened to watch The Lady Gaga documentary and there's this moment in there when she talks about creating this album Joanne that came out. And that Joanne is sort of a tribute to her aunt who was 19 and had lupus.

There's this moment there where Lady Gaga is talking to her grandmother sort of learning more about Joanne story, and her grandmother was like, you know, she had lupus and the doctor said that we needed to amputate her hands, Joanne's hands. And the grandmother said something along the lines of like "well, she's an artist and I can't take her hands away." And sort of ultimately then Joanne past sortly of complications with lupus. It's you know, not sure whether or not the hands had they been amputated would she be saved? It didnt know it's irrelevant.

Just knowing that that's a very real thing and that the sort of sort of following that narrative of that, you know this person with a disability-- that's a life unwanted to live and that if we're not portraying them correctly in our medias - then we're sort of supporting all of these stigmas that exist. This just like, how hard that hit me because I

have friends who have hands that have been amputated as a result of Lupus and and knowing that these are really real themes and concepts.

And just wanting to make sure that is really fuels the work that both I and Nicole and, I think that we all want to do, is to help create a better world where people can feel that they can still exist on this planet regardless of what their bodies look like our function like.

Jay:

So what I've experienced with people that we work with whether they be athletes or whether they be models or actors is that there's a lot of pride in disability these days and there's people are not staying silent. I mean a lot of that has to do with social media and speaking out and you know working with other people and raising the voice, but I think that the disability activism is being heard.

I know that it's being heard in Hollywood. I know that that you know, for a long time when you would talk about just diversity in Hollywood you talk about, you know race you would talk about sexual orientation or sex but I think disability is now becoming part of the conversation.

I mean Hollywood is a very complex plays with a lot of different players and there is some real strong advocates and some that are not so much, but I think that you know society in general is making a great deal of progress. One thing I would say about the Disability Community is that you know, if the Disability Community was United it's about 20% of the population and it would be the largest minority group in the world and probably the most powerful minority group in the world.

One of the drawbacks and the Disability Community is that we tend to group ourselves according to disability like, you know, I deal with anxiety or someone else deals with depression or an amputation or Cerebral Palsy or Down Syndrome or Autism or whatever and the community has a hard time banding together. And so we've never defined disability as an organization and one of the reasons that we never defined disabilities because we believe that the community is much more powerful when we are united.

Nicole:

I love that and you're hitting on something that Sarah and I have spent a lot of time heart aching about and and it's interesting because a lot of people, you know, Sarah and

I of course our are amputees specifically, so we are very involved specifically and like what you just said the amputee community.

And there is an extreme divide between people who are just “Yes! I'm an amputee and I'm proud *only* to be amputee” versus I've crossed this bridge into disability pride and I'm a part of this larger Community and larger group. And and it's really fighting all of this word stigma that we keep coming back to there's so much stigma around that word that to get people kind of cross into this idea that you're a part of this larger Community is really challenging. But slowly I think was starting to really have those conversations and pull people over the bridge hopefully anyway.

I'm wondering you know, we're talking about white papers were talking about gathering data, and I'm wondering just generally if you could talk about why that that kind of data collection why is that important? And why should we be writing these things in collecting this data?

Jay:

Well, first of all, I'd like to in just to step back for a second because you know, we talk about the Disability Community not really being united. I think that a lot of that has to do with organizations, organizations that are set up for specific disability and fund from that Community.

But I'll give a shout out to a movie that premiered. We were a sponsor of the Sundance Film Festival, which is one of the more prestigious independent film festivals, and they debuted an opening night film called Crip Camp, which I don't know if you've seen but you go back into the 70s where people with all sorts of different disabilities were going to this camp and what grew out of that as they stayed in contact through the years as they really became the leaders of the Disability Rights Movement and you're talking about people with very varying disabilities. So, I mean, I think it's possible. I think it's I think it's you know, I think when they when the community when the individuals rise above the organizations, I think you know that's when that will happen.

I think data is very important when it sort of shows the community by shocking the community of like “this is what the situation is” or it provides the community incentive to act differently. So I'll give you an example. one of our most quoted white papers has to do with First Responders, police, fire EMTs and the takeaway from that was that more police and firefighters died by suicide in the line than in the line of duty now, unfortunately in America, every single week a policeman or a fireman commit suicide.

And so, you know, that's a data point that sort of shocks people that don't does it only shocks the community and why is that so prevalent because there's a tremendous amount of stigma that if you're a firefighter or police officer you come out you say "listen, you know, I'm depressed and I'm having you know suicidal thoughts" they're going to take away your weapon. They're going to suspend your job. You may not get that job back, but by reducing the stigma and not only in a produced the data but you know worked with New York City Police Department, Boston Police Department. And you have been in contact with police departments from all over the country that starts to change attitudes that starts, you know, police chief saying "okay. I'm going to get my office's the help they need and I'm not going to fire them because they're having you know these feeling."

Getting back to Hollywood, you know, we we started to do a number of white paper saying listen, this is how bad you are, you know, 95% of the roles that you show playing disability are not played by by disability and you know, we did a number of white papers and criticism of movies in that in that vein.

And then we turned around and produce the white paper-- you know, that that we commissioned a research firm to look into that did some polling and and what it showed is that most Americans I would prefer to see authentic representation of disability in film TV. And it showed the studios how much money they would make by doing that so, you know, that's another way of saying listen, you know, it's not only the stick but here's the carrot-- here's what how much money you can make by sort of, you know changing and and by the way, you know, you wouldn't go see a film today where you'd see an African-American played by someone who wasn't African American or America American Indian played. Some that's not an American Indian, but you used to typically see shows like that and see characters like that.

So I think that in time whether it's in five years or 10 years or 20 years, you will see people with disabilities playing disability on film. It really takes, not only a change in society and and for the public to say, "this is what I want to see" but also take some leadership in the people that are making the films and there are leaders. Out there.

There are people like John Krasinski who made a Quiet Place who wanted his daughter played by someone who is deaf is deaf character, Millicent Simmonds played. And shows like Edgar Wright, who's director who produced Baby Driver in which he wanted the father to be played by a deaf actor, CJ Jones.

So there are those leaders in the disability Community. We just honored we do an honor every year my dad memory, we give out a hundred thousand dollars to an individual who's really been an advocate for Disability Rights. We've given it out to Marlee Matlin who's the first actress to win an Oscar for playing a disability. She herself is deaf, Senator Tom Harkin who was one of the officers of the Americans with Disabilities Act and this year. We gave out to The Farrlley brothers who are directors and Comedies like Dumb and Dumber, Something About Mary, Shallow Hal and they really have made an effort to put people with disabilities in their films.

And so it was like the last event before covid-19 in March that we put an event together in LA. But you had people you know, like Larry David and Ted Danson and major stars, you know come out and people from the Studio's so it's starting to have, you know, a ripple effect. And I just think it's going to take a little bit longer.

Nicole:

I so two, things. First of all, Sarah and I of course have absolutely watched Crip Camp and we've joined some of the like post webinars conversations that have happened and it made both of us cry multiple times like, it just we are so proud and thankful that that footage was saved and collected and then actually made into something that our generation, and the generations that come can actually watch and like field directly connected to that pride and to like see how much of a badass Judy is so yes, so we are all about that.

And I think I think the other thing that I want to say also is a comment not a question, but just how excited it gets for me too to hear how methodically and thoughtfully the Foundation actually approaches these topics and the care that it gives in in doing the research, in finding the right people, and connecting into the community and doing doing things on a smart and right way. So thank you is the comment that I have to say.

Jay:

But well thank you for that. But I'd also say, you know, we have very little to lose. So first of all as a foundation, we're not raising money. So I don't have to be concerned that I'm going to say the wrong thing or put out a press release and people are going to get upset because I don't have that constituency the other thing in terms of you know, Hollywood or or any other community where we are critical, you know, we don't have anything to lose in that Community, you know, it's a lot of people who are activists but they're working actors and and they don't want to be blackballed by the community. So we're able to really, you know, speak out in those those terms.

And and we're always trying to be as inclusive as possible. So, you know any actor with or without a disability that wants to join our cause I mean, we've been very open and you know, we have an open letter to the studios that we've had, you know, most of the major stars signed calling for authentic representation of disability. But we've worked in so many different fields. I know we are talking a lot about Hollywood right now, but you know many different fields.

And the other thing I would just like to say is that just so that your audience understands. What is the foundation a foundation is especially a Family Foundation is a family that's decided to give away funds and they work on an issue, our issue happens to be disability rights. We take a very Progressive view of disability rights, so we're looking, you know to promote the people working in the community living in the community being, you know, full members of the community. We're not people that support institutionalization or segregation or sheltered workshops, you know, but the other thing is that you know, we are a family now some of us may have disabilities certainly members of our staff have disabilities and our advisory Council and made up of people with disabilities, but I'm very cognizant of the fact.

So several years ago. We founded a group called Link 20 like they is a group of activists. It started in Israel. We have an office in Israel, but expand to the United States, of activists with and without disabilities. And they you know, what we're trying to do is provide resources to help them become better activist. So provide the training we do, a graduate program at MIT for people with disabilities on social activism. But they've had some real strong wins that that, you know weren't our wins. They were the wins of Link 20.

And again why Link 20? 20 percent of the population has a disability, you know, we're linking them together with General Society. But for example baseball for over a hundred years Major League Baseball had the term the disabled list. And so they wrote to Major League Baseball saying this term is offensive to us. We are people disabilities and automatically baseball change the term to the Injured list. You know, and you talking about a sport that more Americans watch than any other sport. They had some of our activists and Link 20 are Paralympians and you did not have equal pay or winning medals for Olympians and Paralympians and so they petitioned the US Olympic Committee and finally they won so the paralympians and now paid in parity with Olympians. So they've had some great, you know wins they've challenged airports on being more accessible for people with disabilities. So I think that that's a win and by the way, you know as we go

away as a foundation in however long, you know that may be we want to be able to help others become, you know better activists and some people don't need, a Judy Heumann and someone that I've known for a long time. I think Judy was born an activist, you know to be an activist, but some people need to be you know, Given the resources to become better activists and you know, I think that that's a big something. I'm very proud of.

Nicole:

I love that. Can you share a little bit about how how the Family Foundation kind of found the disability community and settled on on really working within this community?

Jay:

So I think for us it's sort of it happened by accident, but you know, nothing in life is really by accident. So our first major Grant was to improve the school system in Boston to make it accessible for Children with disabilities. And then when I was living in Israel, I had the ability to form a major partnership with the government of Israel to change policy in Israel to make it more inclusive for people with disabilities. And then I guess I decide to to pursue this strategy of going narrow and deep and focusing on the issue of disability.

And then as I met more people with disabilities and got further into the issue, I realized that you know, there was an added value for us. It was an added value because I saw so many organizations focused on singular disabilities and for us to be a more broad-based, you know organization. And then you know for me the advocacy I think came before. And so that's that's an added value because most foundations They may support advocacy by funding other organizations, but we sort of did it on our own and I think that was because it sort of comes naturally to me, and I saw this as a civil rights issue, I mean, I was always interested from a very young age and did my college thesis on the Civil Rights movement in the United States and this is sort of one of the last Civil Rights movements.

And so I think that that's really why we got very deeply, you know, involved in the issue and it continues to be something that's you know, very satisfying because there's so many parts of society that needs to be changed.

You know, the other thing I would just add to that is that you know, all of us are connected to the issue, you know after we got involved, my nephew was born with Autism. My dad developed a condition called Alpha-1 Antitrypsin where he generally

lost his lung capacity and passed away and he became disabled and there's something someone. I can't remember who said it to me, but you know all of us if we live longer long enough long enough may develop the disability. So it's the one minority group that we will all probably someday joint.

Sarah:

It is! and also when we make things inclusive and welcoming for us or for people with disabilities and we make it accessible for all of us. So it's like this this is good for all of us at any point in time to and I really like that component. I'm also thinking that, so talked about white papers, about funding, about the white papers. We talked about the funding of different programs. Can can you speak a little bit more on other things that the foundation does in sort of Partnerships with programs and sort of what that component looks like?

Jay:

So I want to get back to like, you know, one thing you said about like benefits for people with disabilities benefit all of us. So I remember being involved in Israel where they were first putting in curb cuts and curb cuts were put in for you know from people in wheelchairs, but you know, I was living there with young children, you know, bicycles and baby carriages and so a lot of as we make society more accessible, you know, it does affect more than just the disability community.

I mean, I think we've always taken a an approach in terms of our funding of this is our issue, this is what we would like to do and then approach the organizations that we want to work with that we think are impactful. So you've always taken the approach of we don't take unsolicited proposals, we go out and we look for the organizations that that we want to fund.

And you know, we've worked worked in housing, you know to pose institutionalization a segregated housing Independent Living. We've worked on the issue of employment and you know, a lot of employment programs are focused on people with disabilities getting them the job, but we were really focused on employers and changing attitudes of employers of hiring people with disabilities. Of course education, you know making education accessible to all and not segregated education.

I mean I can tell you in terms of philanthropy, you know, we have butted heads with other organizations and other philanthropists that still are in the mode of segregated housing and I've always liked as a parent when I deal with other parents, I've always said

listen, I'm not your judge, you know, you can raise your children the way you want you think of segregate often. The argument for segregation is "Is it's safer, you know, I'm afraid for my child" and you know, they should be in segregated education segregated housing.

You know, I've always seen disabilities part of the human condition and that, you know a person with a disability just like anyone wants to have everything that anyone else in society would have, you know live in your own place with a person of your own choosing, have a job participate in the community, you know be able to access Transportation. They're all sort of basic human needs that anyone would want. So yeah, I think that's how we've approached our philanthropy.

Sarah:

Just wonderful! I wanted to speak on one of your programs when I was looking through the list of different organizations, I saw that project BIND was on there, which is with the Boys and Girls Club of Dorchester. And when I was in my occupational therapy program at Boston University, my first semester, we got assigned to a program where we did our first level one fieldworks, that's is where it's called. So we're sort of seeing what occupational therapy looks like in the field in the field and mine was at project BIND. So I spent a semester there with another student in my class and it was teaching an inclusive dance program. So it was incorporating both people that had a disability and People/kids that did not have a disability into this like hip-hop dance class room, and it was just really important because these were individuals that do sometimes spend part of their day segregated and perhaps so it was just really important to have them both together. And so that everyone was learning these dance moves together. And then also everyone was learning about each other which is just like a really beautiful and magical program and then we got a dance party at the end with the pizza and it was just really lovely so it made my heart really happy when I saw that that was a program that I had also contributed to for, you know type part of my life.

Jay:

Thank you. Yeah, I mean, I think that you know, everything that we've supported throughout the years have been inclusive. I mean, we would we would and we've told organizations, you know, we're not going to support programs that are just for people with disabilities. It has to be an inclusive element to that and you know part of the going, you know, I guess you're looking to change the attitudes much as the children who are able-bodied is the children who have disability because you know what we found, like I'll never forget, you know, we did this program in in Jerusalem and it just

happened it was in it was in a city square and I had gone into a store to buy something and the cashier said to me she's like, "you know, I want you to know that I had a similar program." She was not someone with a disability, but he said "I had a similar program when I was young and it forever changed my attitude towards people with disabilities."

And I think when you especially when you work with younger people and their introduced disability, it's no big deal. It's not like but you know, most of us are afraid of the other. So the more that you have inclusion the more that you break down these stereotypes. I mean, I can always tell when I walk into a meeting and is a younger person there and I'm talking about this and they're nodding their head and older person, you know. we'll just doesn't get it but you know, one of the things that Judy Heumann will talk to you about, or you know, someone who's really, you know live this experience is that you know, people with disabilities used to be institutionalized and and you know, we went from institutionalization to segregation to now, you know full inclusion in the community, but there's still a lot of people who grew up with their brothers and their sisters and their cousins being institutionalized or segregated and not seeing them.

In fact, you know, one of the most famous cases is President Kennedy, sister Rose Marie who had some form of an intellectual disability her father had a lobotomy performed on her and she was sent away to an institution in Wisconsin and was not seen for decades by the family until Eunice Shriver, who is Tim Shriver + Anthony Shriver's mother and she form Special Olympics and then they formed Best Buddies. But you know the idea that this is my sister and she deserves to be part of you know our our society and people disabilities deserve to be part of our society. and and even organizations that start out as somewhat segregationist like we're going to help children with disabilities are now completely transformed to be very inclusive organizations so you know I think the history plays a law a big part in how people see it.

Nicole:

Yes definitely. I want to be mindful of time and respectful to you but kind of before I asked the "What's next for Ruderman question," I'm wondering if you can talk to us a little bit about what the foundation is thinking about and talking about and doing specifically in a time of COVID-19?

Jay:

So what we did is a couple of what we called sort of "immediate responses." So as I said, you know, we operate in Israel, and we operate in the United States and Israel. We work

with the major public television to make their news broadcasts accessible for all people with disabilities. So whether it is given the news in a very slow spoken manner or with sign language or captions. At a time when a lot of people are going through a lot of fear, that was a way to reach all sectors of the population.

in Boston, you know, I'm always interested in some sort of leadership aspects some some sort of way of doing something that not everyone else is doing. So when COVID-19 hit there was a lot of money put towards it but not with a lot of direction. So we worked with Massachusetts General Hospital, which is one of the biggest hospitals in the Boston area, to give them a grant for doctors nurses and medical personnel to get healthy for mental health issues.

Because you know, we live this life and we're segregating we're living in our houses and so forth and our apartments and we're isolated but so many people that we know are going to work every day and they're in very stressful situations. In fact, we had a very sad case a couple days ago of a doctor in Manhattan who went home and committed suicide because of the horror, that she just couldn't deal with.

You know, some people are doctors and nurses and living in the hospital. They're coming home. They're afraid of infecting their wives or partners or children. So that was one thing that we did.

We also gave a grant to the Boston Police Department. Because they're also showing up to situations where you know, potentially putting themselves at risk. And then our local community gave a grant for emergency response.

But then the other thing that we did because, you know for me I'm thinking in terms of advocacy, you know, what's the biggest issue out there? And and and the what I saw as an issue is a person with a disability getting COVID-19 going to the hospital if they have an intellectual disability or they're already in a compromised situation the hospital discounting their life.

So we reached out to some medical ethicists at University of Pennsylvania and produced a white paper, which basically called for a process of having a committee with representing disability community, caretakers, nurses and doctors to focus and not discounting the lives of people with disabilities because of the situation that they're in before they arrive in the hospital and we you know, there was some success we spoke out. We weren't the only ones but you know, Alabama had some guidelines where they

ask to discount the lives of people with disabilities. We spoke out against that they rescinded that.

In Israel. They put out the health the Ministry of Health put out a statement saying, you know people with disabilities come third on the list. And we activated Link 20 in Israel and they spoke out about that and that all that was also rescinded.

But so I think that this white paper has gotten some traction and will continue to get some traction. You know, I think that we're going to face some issues as we come out of this, you know, I think I saw something today that half of the deaths in America of come out of nursing homes or segregated facilities. So maybe as a society, you know, we say these are not the best places to house people in compromise situations and if they have to be maybe, we put the guidelines in place before, that they're not put at risk because that's really where we've seen a lot of a lot of deaths.

And and you know, we did we act in Israel. We've been active for many many years and moving people segregated housing into their own apartments and not only is that probably what they want, but it's also cheaper it's less expensive for the government to support them in these situations than in segregated housing.

So maybe that's something that that will come out of this as an initial phase. But I don't I mean, I personally, I don't think we're going to pop out of this. I think that you know, this is going to go on for a while and there's going to be a lot of different ramifications that we just don't know about. And one thing as a philanthropic organization is I've never believed in putting everything in jumping into the the issue, you know right away. You have to wait and see how it plays out because things will happen that we don't even know will we don't even know will happen.

Nicole:

Agreed that thank you so much already for for the the work and the funds that have gone out specifically to support it's been interesting following the conversation online in the disability community. Because there's been of course a ton of conversation around around the conversation of where we placed an order a pecking order if it comes down to that but then there's been a little bit of a of a "We Told You So" tone when it comes to specifically talking about a working from home set up, right? We were talking about earlier this 70% unemployment within the disability community and so much of that is the barrier of actually may be physically getting to work or Needing to be at home for whatever reason and and now we're experiencing that full-on. So I'm hoping that that is

a good twist that comes out of this that that work will be a little bit more. Yeah it accessible to our community here.

Jay:

Yeah. I think that I mean for us as an organization since we moved I think in early March to working from home and we're all over the country and all over the world. It hasn't slowed us down at all. I think you know we're still just as busy and I'm on an organization called the National Organization of Disability which focuses on employment and this is sort of making the case from for them that you don't have to show up at a physical place in order to be productive.

In fact, you know when we were talking about the nursing homes, you know, I read something just before coming on this podcast that if we all go over and return to work. We're putting ourselves sort of in the same type of situation being very close to each other and so maybe you know we go on for a while and this will certainly benefit people with disabilities because a lot of work can be done from your home. Yeah.

Nicole:

Yeah. So will you close us out by sharing a little bit? How do we find Ruderman Foundation if we're looking to get involved or help out? How do we do that? And maybe a little bit about what we can look forward to maybe work coming down the pipeline?

Jay:

Well, you can find us on our website at RudermanFoundation.org. You know, we're on Twitter. I mean, I'm personally very accessible on Twitter. You know, I can't deal with every request but you know, I believe and I've written about this in the past, that that philanthropy should be very transparent and you should you should be in touch with people who are in the field.

You know, I think. What's next for us? I'm not sure we still a lot of work in Hollywood that we have not put out yet. But you know, we're waiting until this situation subsides to put it out. I think we've made, we will continue to make, some progress there.

You know, as far as you know, COVID-19. I mean, I think that, you know white papers that are able to go beyond the disability community and are able to to get general society to start thinking differently. That's the direction that I'm interested in going. I mean it's like we work with the disability community and are part of the disability

Community. But but, I, when we engage in a project, I'm always looking to go beyond the community to reach the hearts and minds of people who are not in the community.

Now having said that our society is set up to look at disability as an issue of charity and you know these people "who are less fortunate and they need our help and they need our money and our support" and that's a mindset that everything that we're trying to do is try to change that mindset.

And the champions be on people with disabilities are always people in industry and in entertainment and then in athletics that have a personal connection. They have a child. They themselves have a disability. They have a sibling with disability. We have to move beyond that we have to move to people who just don't have that personal connection right away and realize that this is a Civil Rights issue.

And if I would see one success, it's the banding of the disability Community together. So, you know people are not focused on their their single disability.

Sarah:

Yes, that's incredible. I am excited to live in that world. I hope it comes soon. I'm ready to live in that world. We did it. We appreciate very much the work that you're doing and the organizations that you're supporting and all of the research and paperwork that you're putting out because like that that is what's going to create this better society that we all know needs to happen or we know that needs to happen. But as far able to communicate that to everyone else and sort of get them on their hearts and minds to I really loved that and appreciate that and really want to thank you for the work that you're doing because we need it or world need it.

Sarah:

Thank you for spending part of your day with us. We want to give thanks to our Network Public House media. And for intro beats Jason Barnes with cybernetics for logo art. We want to remember Patrice. You can find his work at [normal person's.com](http://normalperson's.com).

Nicole:

Be sure to follow disarming disability on Facebook and Instagram. and lastly be sure to check out our website disarmingdisability.com where you can find all 13 Episodes of Season 1, links to resources, transcriptions, and discussion questions for each episode. Check out our blog where we feature amazing Disability Advocates.