Disability EmpowHer Network

2023 Annual Report

When Disabled Girls Lead, We All Succeed!

Messages from the Executive Director & the Chair of the Board

As we celebrate three years of empowering girls and women with disabilities, I am proud to acknowledge the growth and success we’ve had as a result of intentional work, meaningful collaborations, and incredible people coming together to help us live our mission every day. This annual report celebrates our continued growth over the past three years and highlights stories of success from 2023. We recognize that the pursuit of connecting, motivating, and guiding disabled girls and women to grow, learn, and develop to their highest potential and have the confidence to lead is a collective effort, and we would not be where we are today without your support. Thank you to all of our funders, donors, staff, volunteers, and community partners for supporting our critical efforts and believing in the potential of girls and women with disabilities. Best, Stephanie Woodward, Executive Director

I am so pleased to write my second letter to you as Chairperson of the Board of Disability EmpowHer Network. DEN has not only survived but thrived when many other new non-profits would have struggled. I’m particularly proud of one development from 2023. DEN held its first leadership Institute in addition to already-established programs. While EmpowHer Camp is limited to participants aged 18 and younger, DEN supports connection, supports, and empowerments of disabled women of all ages. The staff of DEN had to respond to many challenges that changed the venue but not the value of Leadership, which attracted women from across New York State. Our Executive Director has assembled an amazing team that I believe can do anything! You can be part of our team, too, by becoming an EmpowHer Champion! Join me in committing to raising funds to support these life-changing experiences.

Yours, Katy Carroll, Board Chair

**Snapshot of 2023**

2023 was an incredible year for Disability EmpowHer Network! In the past year, we saw so much growth, and got to witness the impact that disabled girls, women, and feminine-aligned people are having on the world around them. Some highlights include:

* A 100% graduation rate for the EmpowHer Camp Class of 2023
* Starting EmpowHer Roc+, our leadership and skill-building group for women with disabilities aged 21 and up
* Hosting our first annual Disabled Women’s Retreat in Syracuse, NY
* Building out EmpowHer Expressions, our public speaking program for disabled women and guiding two cohorts of disabled women through the program.
* Features in twelve different media outlets about the amazing work our staff and program participants have been doing to make a difference in the world.
* Publishing our first research paper, “Disabled Women in the Working World: Bias and Barriers that Hinder Workplace Advancement.”
* And more!

*EmpowHer Camp*

The summer of 2023 was a big one for EmpowHer Camp, we graduated our second class of young leaders, the Class of 2023, and welcomed our biggest class yet - the Class of 2024. In 2023, 16 young leaders were part of EmpowHer Camp. That brings our total to 25 young leaders in EmpowHer Camp in our first 3 years! The Class of 2023 was excited to reunite in Washington, D.C. in July where they presented their projects, met with their senators, and demonstrated their leadership skills! The yearlong projects ranged from getting evacuation chairs in school districts, to creating and distributing 50 comfort kits to emergency shelters, to focusing on the importance of personalized evacuation plans for students with disabilities during a school shooting, and so much more. 100% of the the Young Leaders graduated from the program. Our Young Leaders reported that communication skills was their biggest area of growth. The Class of 2024, our new and biggest class of Young Leaders, are now on their yearlong journey. After only a week of camping to start it off, there was tremendous growth in confidence, teamwork, and discipline as well as exciting project plans for how to help their community.

“Mentor matching and being surrounded by other disabled people for the first time in my life was the best part of EmpowHer Camp.” - Young Leader

**Fast Facts**

CONFIDENCE: 100% of young leaders from both classes reported an increase in confidence as a result of Camp

COMMUNICATION: over 86% of young leaders from both classes reported improvement in communication.

IMAGE 1, Pg 4: A group of young disabled people all in Disability EmpowHer sweatshirts that say “disabled women make history” on a dock smiling at the camera.

IMAGE 2, Pg 4: A group of 5 young disabled people in front of the White House smiling at the camera.

**Camp Alumni Updates**

Our team is committed to supporting graduates for 6 years after they graduate camp or until their get their first job, whichever happens later. As these incredible individuals apply for college, internships, jobs, and more, we are here to support them through it all. Across the last year, we’ve written letters of recommendation, completed nomination forms, and used our collective disability knowledge to help navigate the struggles of young adulthood. All of this while also discussing all things Taylor Swift and celebrating 3 members graduating high school!

**Our Alumni Use Their Voices!**

In 2023, our graduates had many opportunities to share their perspective: - 2 spoke on a panel for the Administration on Community Living. - 2 led a workshop at the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living conference. - 1 was interviewed about disability mentorship by their local public radio station.

**Alumni Spotlight On Opal**

Opal was a member of the inaugural EmpowHer Camp class. During her yearlong experience, she created a guide for her community with the emergency resources available for people with disabilities. Since then, Opal started college studying creative writing and social work and got a job at an independent living center doing peer youth advocacy. She presented at the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living 2023 Conference with EmpowHer bestie, Hannah and received the Linda Gonzalez Award for Outstanding Rural Youth. Opal continues to work towards her goals of independent living by practicing transferring and learning new skills.

**EmpowHer Roc**

This past year, the young leaders of EmpowHer Roc learned, grew, and connected with new and old friends. Throughout the year, the group met 12 times to learn and practice self-advocacy, independence, communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills. There have been 27 young leaders involved with the program across the year and with the support of our team.

In addition to organizing our monthly meet ups, our team collaborated with the Women’s Foundation of Genesee Valley on the Power Her Forward Girls Conference which brought together teenage girls from the Rochester area for a day of workshops, games, and more, including a workshop by our EmpowHer Roc Coordinator, Taneeka.

“I like talking to “my family”- they’re very special to me and I love hanging out with all the other people. They help me to speak up and we help each other when we need it.” - Kaelyn

**EmpowHer Roc+**

After many request from community members, in January our team hosted the first meeting of EmpowHer Roc+, a group for adult women with disabilities (Leaders) in the Rochester area. Each month a different Leader coordinated with our team to plan and execute the event developing fun, engaging, and educational activities for the group. Across the year, participants set and met goals, learned about self-advocacy and self-love, and became a family. In December, the group had their first overnight event as they traveled to Syracuse for the Disabled Women’s Retreat where they learned about leadership, communication, teamwork, and advocacy.

**Disabled Women’s Retreat**

On the first weekend of December, Disability EmpowHer Network brought together participants of their EmpowHer Roc+ and EmpowHer Roc programs along with disabled women from across New York State to participate in our first even women’s leadership retreat in Syracuse, New York.

During the weekend, the disabled women attended workshops on topics such as elevator speeches, budgeting, intention boards and goal setting, teamwork, and communication.

The group spent time across the retreat getting to know each other, most notably during the mall scavenger hunt, which culminated in a gift exchange where each person was challenged to buy something that would support their giftee’s goals for the new year.

**Fast Facts**

SATISFACTION: 100% of survey respondents said they were you satisfied with the EmpowHer Roc+ Winter Leadership Retreat.

COMMUNICATION: 94% of respondents shared feeling that they are better able to say what they want or what is most important to them, because of their participation.

ADVOCACY: 94% of respondents reported their participation in this leadership retreat increased their advocacy.

**What the attendees said:**

“One thing I took away from the retreat is that I have a huge network of women that support and encourage me to live outside of my comfort zone because that is where my leadership skills grow and shine.”

“I now can talk to new people with confidence.”

“I appreciated that the days didn't seem too long and there were fun activities and breaks. Sometimes at other conference like events the seminars are long and lose my interest and I also fear I'll miss out on something if I take my own breaks. This wasn't like that.”

**EmpowHer Expressions**

In 2023, we restructured the public speaking lessons we have been providing over the years into an 8 week virtual program for disabled women offered twice a year (once in the spring and once in the fall). Across the 8 week program, participants practiced their public speaking skills and met with successful disabled women guest speakers on topics such as elevator speeches, negotiations, impromptu speaking and more! Participants completed assignments that helped them practice their public speaking skills and prepare for the final week of class where they each gave a speech on a topic of their choosing. In the fall, we added a mentoring component where participants met with a successful disabled woman mentor once a week 1-on-1 for support with practicing her public speaking skills and navigating individual anxieties, scenarios, and more. In 2023, we helped 16 disabled women strengthen their public speaking and leadership skills and in turn feel more confident in themselves and their work.

“I really loved this class, and I'm so grateful to be a part of it. I really feel like I can tackle the world! Thank you to everyone at the EmpowHer Network, this has been a life changing experience.” - Rebecca

**Fast Facts**

GOALS: 100% of participants reported that they achieved the goals they set for themselves at the start of the program.

CONFIDENCE: 87.5% of participants this year reported an increase in their confidence from the beginning to the end of their time in the program

**The Power of Words**

*Letter From a Role Model*

In 2023, we continued to connect women and girls with disabilities in need of mentorship with successful disabled women role models through our penpal program Letter from a Role Model. With the support of some incredible disabled women volunteers and interns, we have been able to more quickly and effectively match nominees with mentors from our list of volunteers. These connections provide a lifeline for many women and girls with disabilities with little to no representation or connection to disabled women like them.

**Research Paper**

On International Women’s Day, Disability EmpowHer Network released our first published study, “Disabled Women in the Working World: Bias and Barriers that Hinder Workplace Advancement”. The study surveyed hiring professionals about their organization’s hiring practices, professional development and employee benefits, and disability representation to gain perspective on the regular business practices that may hinder the career growth for women with disabilities.

**Fast Fact**

Number of downloads of paper from SSRN: 230

**EmpowHer Stories**

In 2023, Disability EmpowHer Network continued collaborating with Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation on EmpowHer Stories, a blogging program uplifting the perspectives of women and girls with paralysis. These blogs covered a variety of topics from wheelchair ballroom dancing and interdependence to accessible cook and spelunking. All of our blogs can be found on Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation’s website and Disability EmpowHer Network’s website.

**Fast Fact**

Women & girls with paralysis whose voices were uplifted: 33

**Disabled Women Make History (and Art)**

For a second year, Disability EmpowHer Network partnered with the Toledo Museum of Art for Disabled Women Make History (& Art!), a program created to celebrate the landmark Olmstead decision and creative disabled women artists.

 This year we invited disabled women artists from across the country to submit their art for consideration to be included in an exhibit at the Toledo Museum of Art. From 52 submissions, our committee selected 20 artists who were invited to take part in the exhibit.

A new addition this year was two exclusive workshops for the featured artists to help advance their skills. These workshops provided artists with information and discussions on marketing and selling their art and practicing public speaking as it related to their art. Following the workshops, we opened the doors to the public to immerse themselves in the exhibit. The event attracted over a hundred eager attendees, drawn by the allure of captivating artwork and the opportunity to engage with the talented artists behind them.

"This was my first art show and it was great! Spending time with other artists and enjoying the art at the museum was truly wonderful for my soul... It was a wonderful day full of kind souls, honest feedback, and new friends. Now to try to fill up my days with more of this!" Andi Barber, Artist

**In The News**

Disability EmpowHer Network loves uplifting the voices and perspectives of our participants in many ways, and in particular we have loved seeing their and our growth and efforts recognized by both disability-led and mainstream media XX times this year. From showcasing our Young Leaders and their projects to featuring our staff as experts, we are thankful for every story we are involved with. Here are a few highlights:

**HuffPost features EmpowHer Camp**

In April, Madison, Class of 2023, and Anja, Class of 2022, shared their perspective as students with disabilities with HuffPost for an article about evacuation plans (or the lack thereof) for students with disabilites.

**The 19th article about harassment**

Executive Director, Stephanie interviewed with the 19th about her experiences with workplace sexual harassment and how it led to the founding of Disability EmpowHer Network.

**Toledo Blade Covers Art Event**

The Toledo Blade published an article on the success of Disabled Women Make History (and Art) show in June.

**Spectrum One story on Roc+**

In a video interview, EmpowHer Roc+ participant, Amy, and coordinator, Mandie, discussed pursuing career goals and creating community and planning events for EmpowHer Roc+.

After successfully advocating for the purchase of evacuation chairs by her school board, Giana was interviewed about her journey.

**News 10 covers Women of Worth**

News 10 interviewed Stephanie and Young Leader CeCe after Stephanie received L’Oréal Paris’s Women of Worth award

**Additional Media Coverage**

Chicago Sun Times, WPBS Weekly, Raising Kellan Podcast, Connections with Evan Dawson, Spectrum News, and Williston Herald

**Disabled Women Making History**

Every day, the incredible women in our network are making history. Here are just a few from 2023 who are making significant strides and enhancing the world:

**Jenny Border**

*Disability Mentoring Hall of Fame*

Jenny served as a mentor for our inaugural EmpowHer Camp Class of 2022 and has been nothing but a constant support to our young leaders and to Disability EmpowHer Network ever since! We are proud to celebrate Jenny’s induction into the Disability Mentoring Hall of Fame!

**Anja Herrman**

*White House Celebration of Girls Leading Change*

For her EmpowHer Camp Community Impact Project, Anja conducted a national study to assess how prepared school districts are to help disabled students during school shootings. First Lady Dr. Jill Biden was impressed with Anja’s work and invited Anja to the White House for this honor!

**Stephanie Woodward**

*L’Oreal Paris Woman of Worth*

Each year, L’Oreal Paris selects 10 extraordinary nonprofit leaders working to address the nation’s biggest issues for their Women of Worth Award. In 2023, L’Oreal Paris chose our Executive Director, Stephanie Woodward, for this honor which included a $25,000 grant to Disability EmpowHer Network!

**Giana Bisnett**

*Strong Wheeled Together Award*

EmpowHer Camp graduate, Giana, advocated for her school to acquire emergency evacuation chairs for her Community Impact Project. Her advocacy was so effective that her entire school district got evacuation chairs. United Spinal honored Giana for her incredible advocacy efforts!

**Disability EmpowHer Network**

*Elevating Women Award*

In 2023, the Rochester Business Journal selected Disability EmpowHer Network for its inaugural Elevating Women Award. The Elevating Women Award shines a light on companies and organizations that have demonstrated tangible efforts and documented results in supporting and empowering women in New York.

**EmpowHer Champions**

EmpowHer Champions are dedicated to empowering girls and women with disabilities. EmpowHer Champions support our work by committing to raising funds for Disability EmpowHer Network so we are able to empower more girls and women with disabilities.

Amy

Chrysanthemum

Curran

Hannah

Jenny

In 2023, EmpowHer Champions raised over $25,000 which directly impacts the girls and women with disabilities in our programs! Thank You EmpowHer Champions!

Johileny

Katy

Kieran

Lily

Liz

Melanie

Mia

Opal

Sophie

Taneeka

**BIG THANKS!**

Because of you, we've been able to help girls and women grow, learn, and develop to their highest potential and have the confidence to lead. Your support has also helped us to expand our programs to impact even more girls and women with disabilities!

**Donors**

Monthly Donors Amy Krebs Christine Dunaway Jacquelyn Grippe James Dukette Jason Scott Laura Van Tosh

**$1000+** A Loving Supporter Scott Williams

**$500 - $999** Aaron Smith Catrina Latten Elliot Vos Marjorie Gilbert Stephen Algood

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**Special Day Donors** Many thanks to those who generously donated their birthdays and other special days to raise funds for Disability EmpowHer Network

**$500+** Jennifer Longdon Jenny Border Johileny Meran Keran O’Brien Kern Macie Collier

**$250 - $499** Ann Dart Washington Chris Tryon Davi Kallman Naomi Hess Natalia Mendez Roger Levy

**$1 - $249** Amanda AJ Baker Brenda Lee Carolyn Abdenour Bogues Courtney Gay Hightower Danielle Bentley David Wittie Emily Sharpe Jim Dukette Katherine Knight Kellie Cusack Melanie Oyer Taneeka Afify Victoria M Mack

We appreciate the generosity of all of our donors & respect the privacy of the individuals who wished to remain anonymous. If we omitted or misspelled your name, please accept our apologies & contact Stephanie at Stephanie@DisabilityEmpowHerNetwork.org

**Partners in Empowerment**

Our grantors have ensured that we can continue the work we do to empower disabled women and girls. With their support in 2024, we have been able to sustain and grow our programs and team.

Ford Foundation

Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation

Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation

IWPF

NuMotion Foundation

Golisano Foundation

Women’s Foundation of Genesee Valley

Greater Rochester Health Foundation

Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation

Florence M. Muller Foundation

New York State Independent Lving Concil, Inc

John F. Wegman Fund

New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council

Bernice Stauber Fund

John Dillon Park- International Paper

L'oréal Paris

Charlee Marie & Me Craft Studio

Toledo Museum of Art

Quantum Rehab

Artisan Church

Anthem

Disability Network Washtenaw Monroe Livingston

P3

United Way

APRIL-Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living

Brown and Brown of New York Inc.

Adirondack Experience; The Museum on Blue Mountain Lake

Ohio Olmstead Task Force

Sunrise Medical

Great Lakes ADA Center

Landscape Structures

Stewart’s Shops

Wegmans

**What our partners are saying:**

“The Golisano Foundation is proud to support Disability EmpowHer Network. The work done by DEN builds confidence while allowing women with disabilities to grow, learn, and develop to their highest potential. We believe Disability EmpowHer Network makes a difference in the lives of all those involved in their expanding programs." Erica Dayton, Golisano Foundation Executive Director

"The Toledo Museum of Art's mission is to integrate art into the lives of people. One of my personal missions is to bring awareness to the disability experience. Over the last two years, I've felt honored to fulfill these missions while uplifting disabled women and non-binary artists through Disabled Women Make History (and Art) with Disability EmpowHer Network. As a disabled woman, I feel strongly that disabled women should support each other and find community with one another. This event has allowed disabled artists to connect with other creatives, while also sharing their personal experience with disability, thus integrating art, and a greater understanding of the disability experience into the lives of others.” Katie Shelley, Conda Family Manager of Access Initiatives at the Toledo Museum of Art

**2023 Financials**

We are thrilled to announce another year of robust support from our incredible grantors, donors, and corporate partners, enabling us to empower more girls and women with disabilities! As we plan for the future, we pledge to maintain financial responsibility to guarantee sustainability and uphold the quality of our programs.

**Support & Revenue**

Grants: $351,198

Donations: $55,981

Corporate Partnerships: $30,153

Fee for Service: $21,707

Merch: $3,051

**Expenses**

Program Expenses: $258,705

Administrative Expenses: $24,354

Fundraising Expenses: $1,113

More than 90% of expenses go directly to our empowering programs!

**In Their Own Words**

*Riley, Camp Graduate:*

"The skills and experience I gained from Empower Camp have been instrumental in achieving my career and educational goals. I look to Disability EmpowHer Network as an example in great organizational leadership and I hope to carry that example into my own professional future."

*Khloe, EmpowHer Roc Young Leader:*

“I like that I have learned not to be freaked out about people with physical disabilities. I have a friend now without legs. Girl power taught me not to be scared and make history!”

*Julianne Douglas, Parent*

"Disabled women not only make history but they also help build futures. Disability EmpowHer Network (DEN) fiercely makes space for that to happen. We have been thrilled to watch opportunity after opportunity arise since Peyton (Ace) attended EmpowHer Camp. DEN embraced Ace with gusto, and taught us parents a thing or two about stepping back a bit. All parents reckon with releasing the reins as their kids grow, but DEN holds that bar higher, reminding us that dignity of risk is indispensable for growth. DEN shows us that when we stretch, the world does, too. Indeed young disabled women and nonbinary folks like Ace can change the world. Disability EmpowHer Network makes sure of it.”

***When disabled girls lead, we all succeed!***

Thank you for believing in the potential of girls & women with disabilities.

Stephanie Woodward Executive Director 585-269-9184 Stephanie@DisabilityEmpowHerNetwork.org DisabilityEmpowHerNetwork.org

We'd love to talk!