

**The Newton Commission On Disability, Understanding Our Differences  
& the Newton Free Library Present:**

**“What Does Disability Pride Mean to You?”**

**Moderated by Gary Alpert - Wednesday, July 17, 2024, 7:00 – 8:30 pm**

**PANELISTS:**

**Nyree Kibarian** has been a Newton resident for 2.5 years and has served on the Newton COD since 2022. Her disability journey began when she was diagnosed with a neuromuscular disease called Emery Dreifus Muscular Dystrophy in childhood, eventually becoming a wheelchair user during her teenage years. Nyree took her first official step into the world of disability while at Regis College when she joined Northeast Passage’s wheelchair rugby team. At that time she was the only woman on the team! She now works in insurance as a Senior Advisory Representative at Marsh USA, is the Co-Chair of Marsh’s volunteering resource group, Marsh Cares, and is a member of Marsh’s Women’s Exchange.

**Barbara Lischinsky** was born with a retinal disease that took her eyesight and has now also lost much of her hearing. Barbara moved to Newton 21 years ago to be near the T to commute to work and school in Cambridge and has been a member of the COD ever since. She is an avid athlete and has run 7 Boston Marathons with a sighted guide. In 2018 Barbara was inducted into the Team with A Vision Hall of Fame. She retired from competitive sports after 4 spine surgeries for scoliosis but still enjoys pilates, spinning and swimming. Barbara has an Ed.M. from Harvard University and is a retired Professor of Biology. She walks everywhere with her best friend, her guide dog, Autumn.

**Jack Lovett** has lived in Newton since 2006, attending Bowen Elementary School, Oak Hill Middle School, and Newton South High School. Jack has Asperger's Syndrome and chronic Tinnitus (ear ringing), and also has a brother with severe Autism. He currently serves as Co-Chair of the Newton Commission on Disability (COD) and serves on the Newton Public Schools' Disability Advisory Group (DAG). Jack also works for the City of Newton full-time. In what remains of his free time, Jack enjoys reading about American history.

**Nathan Persampieri** is a recent graduate of Merrimack College, where he studied Social Justice. He is on the Advisory Board of Understanding our Differences, and has been a speaker for their Physical Disabilities unit off and on for about 3 years. Nathan is very passionate about disability and accessibility in the city of Newton and elsewhere. He is excited to be on this panel to give a voice for people with disabilities and to celebrate disability pride!

**Robert Solomon** has been a disability advocate since the late 1960s when as a high schooler he began volunteering at MARC Trust, one of the first special needs trusts for persons with disabilities in Massachusetts, founded by his parents. He became permanently disabled following a radiation error during treatment for non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma in 2003. Since then he has advocated for better Green Line station accessibility, collaborated with Newton’s ADA coordinator Jini Fairley, he is the co-founder of Inclusive Design Newton, and he has worked to resolve barriers to equal access in medical centers and universities. Robert is an art historian whose focus is on Abstract Expressionism and the New York School. He teaches at Brandeis’ Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

**Moderator Gary Alpert** is the co-president of Understanding Our Differences’ Board of Directors and a long-time speaker for UOD’s Deafness unit. Gary, an advocate for people with disabilities, grew up in Newton, Massachusetts. Being deaf, Gary has made significant contributions to both education and the music industry. He has worked extensively with public and private schools, as well as universities, to promote disability awareness and inclusion. A notable member of the Massachusetts State Commission on People with Disabilities under former Governor Deval Patrick, Gary has played a pivotal role in shaping policies and advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities. In the music industry, Gary combines his passion for photography with his advocacy work, serving as a photographer and disability access advisor for various venues. His efforts ensure that music events are accessible to all. In addition to Gary’s advocacy work he is currently Director of Admissions and Community Outreach at the Christa McAuliffe school in Framingham.

**[Image description of the Disability Pride Flag:** Black background with 5 colored bands running diagonally from top left corner to bottom right corner. The colored bands from the bottom are: Red - Physical disabilities, Gold or yellow - Neurodiversity & Cognitive and intellectual disabilities, White - Non-visible and undiagnosed disabilities, Blue - Psychiatric disabilities, including mental illness, anxiety, and depression, Green - Sensory disabilities.]



**The Disability Pride Flag** was designed by Ann Magill in 2019, and updated by her in 2021 to accommodate people with visually triggered disabilities. The flag features a black background representing mourning and rage for victims of ableist violence and abuse. Diagonal bands of color stand for “cutting across” walls and barriers that separate people with disabilities from the rest of society. The five colors—red, gold, white, blue and green—represent the spectrum of needs and experiences of individuals with disabilities: physical disabilities, neurodivergence, invisible and undiagnosed disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, and sensory disabilities, respectively. The parallelism of the stripes symbolizes solidarity among communities.