

"Promoting Peace Through Citizen Diplomacy"
Susan Sygall
Mobility International USA
International Disability Rights Affirmation Conference 2025
Thursday, November 6

[2025/11/06 12:28] Elektra Panthar: Hello everyone.

Today's presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time.

A little explanation about this service.

Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.

Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.

You will see the transcription in local chat.

Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.

The transcriptionists are Elektra Panthar, Katie Cunningham

The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speaker:

SS: Susan Sygall (VAIPresenter4)

<<transcription begins>>

[2025/11/06 12:31] Sarannalyn Resident: Hello, everyone and welcome to Virtual Ability's 14th annual IDRAC Conference.

My SL name is Sarannalyn, or Sara for short, and I have been in SL for a little over 14 years.

In RL, I live in my own house in Maine, am a disabled retiree with hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, Ankylosing Spondylitis, PTSD/depression/anxiety, and am recovering from a brain injury from a bad car accident.

When I'm not taking care of my house, my dogs, doing physical therapy or going to doctor's appointments, I volunteer, take online courses, paint, read, practice music and various needle arts, and drive friends to get groceries or to appointments,

In SL, I participate in church activities running a prayer group, Bible study groups, and organizing church services. I also like going to both DJ'd and live classical and jazz music programs and exploring nature sims.

Our speaker today is Susan Sygall, an American disability rights advocate and civil rights leader for which she has received numerous awards, including the 1995 Presidential Award from then-President Bill Clinton.

Susan is also a wheelchair rider and the CEO and co-founder of the non-profit organization Mobility International USA (<https://miusa.org>).

[2025/11/06 12:34] Elektra Panthar: SS: hi everybody, I'm thrilled to be here! You may also hear my colleague Ashley

Have you ever heard of MIUSA? Tell us in chat

[2025/11/06 12:35] Buffy Beale: no, but I'm Canadian

[2025/11/06 12:35] Marylee Swift (Marylee Mermaid): My co-worker works there now.

[2025/11/06 12:35] Brian Aviator: I have not. Looking forward to learn more about it!

[2025/11/06 12:35] Elektra Panthar: SS: We are based in Eugene, OR and our mission is to

- Advancing disability rights and leadership globally.®
- International exchange to international development
- Disability-led non-profit organization
- Founded in 1981, based in Eugene, Oregon, USA
- Over 2600 alumni from over 135 countries

[2025/11/06 12:36] Elektra Panthar: SS: My story: I was studying in California and I saw a scholarship to study abroad, I applied and was able to go study in Australia, I was able to go around with a golf cart in campus and go hitchhiking

So I wondered why people with disabilities don't get many changes to travel abroad? Did any of you have an international exchange experience, either by studying, volunteering or working?

[2025/11/06 12:37] Gentle Heron: I have presented in other countries.

[2025/11/06 12:37] Lorin Tone: I have in Northern Europe

[2025/11/06 12:37] Alita Starling: a student came from Germany to here before, he was very proper and never used contractions, that was very attractive

[2025/11/06 12:38] Max Chatnoir: Army brat-- lived in Japan and Germany
Spent a summer in France also

[2025/11/06 12:38] Sheila Yoshikawa: Yes I did a year abroad a LONG time ago when I studied German at university

[2025/11/06 12:38] Elektra Panthar: SS: I wanted to let you know that one of our programs is

NCDE National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange

- Share information and advice
- Provide guidance on reasonable accommodations
- Educate program providers on accessibility
- Elevate stories of exchange alumni with disabilities

We want to make sure people with all kinds of disabilities are able to travel abroad

There will be many links in chat later and you can check out our website as well

<https://miusa.org>

Be an Ambassador for International Exchange

- Share your story with your community
- Encourage other disabled people to pursue international exchange
- Promote the NCDE's resources

Funded International Programs for U.S. Citizens

U.S. Department of State Programs:

- YES Abroad and FLEX Abroad – for high school students
- CBYX – for high school students to Germany
- Critical Language Scholarship – for college students
- Gilman Scholarship – for undergraduate students
- Fulbright U.S. Student Program – for college seniors, graduate students, young professionals and artists
- Fulbright Specialist and Scholar Programs for scholars and professionals

- American Music Abroad for musicians

Other Programs

- Rotary Peace Fellowships for graduate students and professionals
- Boren Awards for college students
- Clinton Fellowship for Service in India - recent college graduates and young

professionals

- Thomas J. Watson Fellowship for recent college graduates
- Cultural Vistas Fellowships for college students
- Rhodes Scholarships to the UK

For more opportunities and details to apply, visit

<https://miusa.org/resource/tip-sheets/fundedprogramsuscitizens/>

I was on a rotary scholarship as well, there are many people with disabilities who won the prestigious Fulbright scholarship, so there are many programs one can apply to

We give free technical assistance for universities to help people apply to these programs, give resources and info on how to travel safely and much more

Scholarships start at 15 and even some up until people in their 70s

Funded International Programs for Non-U.S. Citizens

U.S. Department of State Programs:

- Fulbright – Open to scholars, graduate students, and language teachers.
- Humphrey – Open to mid-career professionals from select countries who hold a

Bachelor's degree.

• Community Solutions Program – Open to professionals from developing countries working in select fields.

• Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) – Open to high school students from countries of the former Soviet Union.

• YSEALI Fellowships – Open to professionals and college students from ASEAN countries.

Other Programs

• Rotary Peace Fellowships – Open to graduate students majoring in Peace Studies or related majors.

• Atlas Corps – Open to non-profit leaders age 35 or younger.

• Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows Program – Open to scholars, journalists, and democratic practitioners.

• Asia Pacific Leadership Program (APLP) – Open to graduate students and early career professionals from the Asia Pacific region.

• Partners of Americas Programs – Open to citizens of South America, Latin America, North America and the Caribbean

For more opportunities and details to apply, visit <https://miusa.org/resource/tip-sheets/fundedprogramslist/>

I really want to get across that if we want to get into the peace movement and know people from all over the world, we can

VAI is a great example for this as well

Feel free to ask us questions and post comments in chat!

Sometimes people with disabilities haven't been included in peace programs, and I think we have a unique perspective for peace building

I remember I was in Bosnia to help rebuilding after the war, we consulted

We brought our alumni all over the world, helped women in leadership roles

One of our other programs is WILD

Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability (WILD)

- Initiated in 1997, outcome of Beijing UN Women's Conference
- Approx. 25 participants each program
- Intensive 3-week training in Eugene, Oregon
- 11 WILD programs to date
- 270 WILD alumni in 91 countries

Disabled women wanted to create a space where they could exchange ideas and strategize

We have three very intense programs that we do every few years, we are trying to make different versions of this programs so that more people can access it

If you're interested you can subscribe to our newsletter

Sign up for our Global Impact mailing list: <https://tinyurl.com/MIUSAenews>

If you are interested in the idea of leadership for disabled women please reach out, we teach many things, self defense, we talk about reproductive health, prevention of sexual assault and much more

Disability Inclusion and Peacebuilding

- Partnership with U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP)
- Disability Inclusion Assessment
- Delivered five virtual trainings for approx. 100 USIP staff
- Local leaders from conflict-affected countries (Haiti and South Sudan) as consultants
- Impact: Increased USIP staff confidence to advocate for and take action on disability inclusion.
- USIP Staff action plans (e.g. making communications accessible, hiring people with disabilities, budgeting for inclusion)
- MIUSA also provided a resource guide and technical assistance to support action plans

Many women of the program went on to be in representative roles in the government

We work with other organizations as well

An example was Armenia

- Partnered with two disability-led organizations, Agate and Equal Rights Equal Opportunities
- Supported opening the first two Independent Living Centers in Armenia
- Facilitated virtual consultations with U.S. experts in Independent Living concepts and NGO management
- Sent Technical Assistance team to meet with local government in Armenia
- Consulted on draft Personal Assistance legislation

I'd love to hear from people in the audience about questions of the field of international exchange and development

[2025/11/06 12:52] Itico (Itico Spectre): Question: I advocate for people with disabilities to run for elected office. I have. Would your organization help with that?

[2025/11/06 12:53] Elektra Panthar: SS: we don't have funds to give but we can help you connect with other people running for office and connect you with other organizations Also ensuring that disabled people have access to voting stations

[2025/11/06 12:53] Susan Sygall (VAIPresenter4 Resident): IFES - an organization which supports disabled people running for office and ensuring that polling places are accessible

[2025/11/06 12:54] Gentle Heron: QUESTION Is there online or printed info for disabled people who want to run for office or otherwise participate in our political process?

[2025/11/06 12:54] Katie (Katie Cunningham): SS: there's an amazing video by 34 of our WILD alumni

On YT - look for "loud wild and proud" on YouTube

If you meet the criteria, no matter how great the disability, we encourage you to take part

Loud proud and passionate video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxxomUVsSik>

[2025/11/06 12:54] Susan Sygall (VAIPresenter4 Resident): Please visit MIUSA's YouTube Channel to find our "Loud Proud and Passionate" music video

[2025/11/06 12:56] Katie (Katie Cunningham): SS: it has been a tough time for us, with cuts happening in the USA, so we do look for funds that's one way to advocate

[2025/11/06 12:55] Lorin Tone: The more advocacy for disabled people, the better, especially due to the current situation in the United States. For those of us with disabilities, mobility is life...it is what enables us to be active in our local RL communities.

[2025/11/06 12:55] Sypha Techno (SyphaTechno Resident): My college had international experiences but nothing I could afford.

[2025/11/06 12:55] Querida Faun - Thorne (LibertyHawk Resident): that was a very provoking topic as a woman with a disability its awesome to know there's an organisation like yours around to support us around the world I'm in Europe and I don't think I'd fit into the political world but a big shout out to those who do have that ambition we need people with a disability in our political systems!

[2025/11/06 12:57] Katie (Katie Cunningham): SS: a lot of times people look at the price for international travel, and there are scholarships, and many people do fundraising; People have creative ways of raising money to have that international experience.

Question [by Querida]: I'm in Europe, and not political...

There are a lot of ways to do advocacy. here in Oregon, fighting for accessibility in Ubers, Lyft

There are those fighting for disability rights in countries around the world,

We have found that it's really helpful to share strategies and information

It has been rewarding too to get to know disabled people from all over the world

[2025/11/06 12:56] Stealth (Cicero Kit): Being in virtual worlds such as SL, can be a great way to connect with people from all over the world when you are too sick to travel.

[2025/11/06 13:00] Katie (Katie Cunningham): SS: Question [by Stealth]: SL is great for connecting all over the world, for those too sick to travel

I encourage you to read some of the stories on our website - friendships, experiences, etc

[2025/11/06 12:58] Lorin Tone: Will point some people at you, thank you for a great presentation. May I ask, does your organization help low income people to obtain mobility devices, be they scooters or wheelchairs?

[2025/11/06 13:00] Katie (Katie Cunningham): SS: Q [by Lorin]: does your organization help low-income people obtain mobility aids?

No, we don't but

There are new devices, like a "3-wheeler" that works with manual wheelchair and helps with difficult terrain

For those of us getting older, I was able to learn about a "smart drive" or smooth.com - in Europe. Gives you a wheel on the back and you add electric capability for 15 to 17 miles.

These devices aren't cheap, though

I wanted to share those

[2025/11/06 13:02] Lorin Tone: Cobblestones will eat darn powered chairs!

[2025/11/06 13:03] Gentle Heron: This may be what she is referring to

<https://hub.pernobil.com/smartdrive>

[2025/11/06 13:03] Katie (Katie Canningham): SS: (comment from YT) - have you worked with aikido groups?

We usually get local instructors, very much into working with women, and working on especially preventing violence

In other places, local groups of the WILD alumni in other countries use their local instructors

Aikido groups does sound like a great thing to do

[2025/11/06 13:05] Sarannalyn Resident: I have a blue belt in Tai Kwon Do...

[2025/11/06 13:05] Gentle Heron: QUESTION- How well does Artificial Intelligence play into what you do? Are you properly represented in AI?

[2025/11/06 13:06] Katie (Katie Canningham): SS: also has a YouTube channel, and we hope you'll spread the word. We don't have money resources, but we do have a lot of information we want to share.

[2025/11/06 13:06] Elektra Panthar: NCDE National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange

- Share information and advice
- Provide guidance on reasonable accommodations
- Educate program providers on accessibility
- Elevate stories of exchange alumni with disabilities

Ashley: share these programs with the broader community so that we can spread the info and the resources!

Stay Up to Date with MIUSA!

Visit us online at <https://miusa.org/>

Email: clearinghouse@miusa.org

Sign up for our Global Impact mailing list: <https://tinyurl.com/MIUSAenews>

Mobility International USA

Creating A World As It Should Be

[2025/11/06 13:07] Katie (Katie Canningham): SS: thanking everyone who has made this conference possible. And the world needs more peace activists

Thank you everybody

[2025/11/06 13:06] Buffy Beale: Fantastic presentation, thanks and love your passion and advocacy for disability!

[2025/11/06 13:07] Lorin Tone: Bravo, excellent presentation!

[2025/11/06 13:07] Lady Tigress Bonded (pet Karu): thank you

[2025/11/06 13:07] Suellen Heartsong: thank you!

[2025/11/06 13:07] kayjaybelle Resident: Thank you!

[2025/11/06 13:07] Gentle Heron: Thank you Susan and Ashley

[2025/11/06 13:08] Lady Tigress Bonded (pet Karu):

[2025/11/06 13:08] Lady Tigress Bonded (pet Karu):

[2025/11/06 13:08] Lady Tigress Bonded (pet Karu):

[2025/11/06 13:08] Loud Laffer: 🎵🎵 ☀️Thank you ☀️ 🎵🎵



[2025/11/06 13:08] Susan Sygall (VAIPresenter4 Resident): Thank you, everyone, for your questions and comments, and if we didn't have time to address your question during this, please keep in touch!

[2025/11/06 13:08] Beth Ghostraven: .-'-. APPLAUSE APPLAUSE .-'-.

[2025/11/06 13:08] Sarannalyn Resident: Thank you, Susan!

[2025/11/06 13:08] Buffy Beale: cheering loudly!

[2025/11/06 13:08] Brian Aviator: Thank. What a great presentation. Very informative.

[2025/11/06 13:08] Eme Capalini: Thank you!

[2025/11/06 13:08] Sarannalyn Resident: ('•.:•:*☆APPLAUSE☆***:•.:•')

[2025/11/06 13:08] ≡ King Amun Ꞗα ≡ (Trapper Acker): ☆Applause☆

[2025/11/06 13:08] Sheila Yoshikawa: Thank you!

[2025/11/06 13:08] James Heartsong (PeacefulJames Heartsong): tc all

[2025/11/06 13:08] Leondra Larsson: ☆**•. ~*•☆*~ .•**☆

[2025/11/06 13:08] Leondra Larsson: ☆**•. QPQ~QUSØ .•**☆

[2025/11/06 13:08] Leondra Larsson: ☆**•. ~*•☆*~ .•**☆

[2025/11/06 13:08] Katie (Katie Cunningham): (•.:•'~•.: Applause •.:•'~•.:)

[2025/11/06 13:08] Gentle Heron: Lots of potential here folks. I hope you take advantage of what MIUSA offers.

[2025/11/06 13:08] Elektra Panthar: <<transcription ends>>