

# Three Examples of Disability in the News

Here are three summaries for thinking about disability in the news. They come from real incidents. These summaries can be used to stimulate further research and writing on the topic and to explore how the language and point of view of a journalist or editorial writer can shape our responses to a particular topic in the news.

**Getting Ready:** In preparation for the class discussion and for writing their own stories or editorials, ask students to imagine that they have been asked to cover one of these stories for their local or school newspaper. What focus do they want their story or editorial to take? What research do they need to do? Whom could they interview? Where else could they go for more information?

**Conclude** with review of respectful language and review of assignments: Ask students to write a two-page article or commentary on the topic of their choice. Remind students to use respectful language and other press guidelines. Have students present or post their stories for reading and discussion by the class.

## **Bullying & Harassment**

Janice is a seventh-grader in a local school. She is a quiet girl who uses a wheelchair and a voice synthesizer and other adaptive equipment to speak and do her schoolwork. Janice has a few close friends at school and is often lonely. People often pass her as if she isn't there or give her odd looks. Two days ago Janice and her family found out that a group of kids had used the school's computer to set up and manage a "Hate Janice" website. Kids were leaving messages about Janice being weird because of her disability, making jokes about her being dumb and a cripple.

This story is based on a real situation that happened several years ago. Have you heard or seen examples of bullying or harassment in your school? How would you research bullying at your school and in Vermont? Where would you look for background information and what questions would you ask classmates, school administrators, teachers and state officials?

## **The R Word**

Disability advocates in Vermont and other states have a campaign to end the use of the R word. Green Mountain Self-Advocates and the Vermont Coalition for

Disability Rights are two of the organizations leading this work in Vermont. Students at Harwood Union High School have created a public service announcement to support this campaign. How could you develop a story about this campaign? What could you do to include the opinions of students and teachers in your article?

### **Edmunds Middle School Elevator Campaign or other Local Accessibility Campaigns**

Review the coverage that this issue got in the local news. (We found several stories just by entering the phrase “Edmunds Middle School elevator in the news” into our search engine.) Share examples of the coverage found on the web and in local papers. Have students break into small groups to review the print and TV articles, letters to the editor, editorials and blogs. Have students make a chart summarizing examples of news articles, letters to the editors or blogs on the story and the points of view reflected in each document. Have the students review the different examples and select one that they think is a good objective news article and two thoughtful responses from readers. Have students write an editorial sharing both facts and their opinions about this campaign. Discuss the differences between a news article and commentary (readers’ response or editorials).

### **Supplemental Assignment & Additional Resources**

Supplemental Assignment: Ask students to compare and contrast reporting styles used by the general news media to those used by the disability press. Discuss why these differences exist and the importance of reviewing both when doing research and preparing their own news stories or paper. In addition, students may notice that some disability advocates and culturally Deaf individuals will not always use “person-first” language because of political and social pride in their disability identity and experience. This is an interesting example of political and social choices in language use that are reflected in some Deaf and disability rights and self-advocacy publications. Similar language choices have been made in other social justice movements. It is important to note that “people-first language” is still expected in mainstream journalism. While it is appropriate for people with disabilities and Deaf individuals to choose the language they use, most journalists should continue to use the style guides referenced in this lesson.

## **Bullying, Harassment and Abuse**

[National Bullying Prevention Center](#) has background information and student-generated materials on bullying and harassment.

The Vermont Human Rights Commission's website has several tools and resources for schools, including how to recognize and understand the differences between bullying and harassment and a summary of legal rights and protections. It can be found at: [Vermont Human Rights Commission school harassment page](#).

Results of the 2012 National Survey on Abuse of People with Disabilities, titled "Abuse of People with Disabilities, Victims and Their Families Speak Out," is available at: <http://disability-abuse.com/survey/survey-report.pdf>.

## **Getting Rid of the R Word**

Information on local, national and international advocacy in the "Getting Rid of the R Word Campaign" can be found at the website <http://www.r-word.org/>, on YouTube, in news stories and on advocacy sites on the Internet. A Vermont resource is Green Mountain Self-Advocates, a statewide self-advocacy organization active in this campaign. Visit their website at <http://www.gmsavt.org/>

## **Accessibility**

The U.S. Department of Justice and the National Network of ADA Technical Assistance Centers both cover accessibility complaints and decisions and provide information on legal requirements and related resources. The ADA National Network can be found at: <https://ada.org>. The Department of Justice website is: [www.ada.gov/](http://www.ada.gov/).

You can also download a free copy of the booklet, "Disability Etiquette, Tips on Interacting with People with Disabilities at: <http://www.unitedspinal.org/disability-etiquette/>. This booklet has some helpful illustrations of accessibility tips as well as tips on language and courtesy.

## **Youth Advocates and Language Tips**

The National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN) and Kids as Self Advocates (KASA) are two youth-led disability advocacy organizations. They created a fact

sheet on respectful language, “Respectful Disability Language: Here’s What’s Up!” It can be found at: [Respectful Disability Language: Here’s What’s Up!](#)