

ISSUE 6 DECEMBER 2025 - MARCH 2026

RESILIENCE

A Lifestyle Magazine for People With Disabilities Who Want to Live More Fully

**ENSURING THE
INCLUSION OF
PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES**

**The Story of
StoryCorps**

**A Blog for
Divas With
Disabilities**



**Latino Exercise Focus Group
Leaps Into Virtual Reality**

Warrior Games 2025
Finding His Way Back
It 'Changed My Life'

Loneliness & Diabetes



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EDITOR'S NOTE: For some readers, downloading the PDF of this publication may offer a better reading experience.

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RESILIENCE

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Message From the Publisher and Editor

Welcome to *RESILIENCE*.

In this issue, we talk about a problem that people with disabilities and other minorities in this country are facing due to the Trump administration's attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

The administration's policies against DEI mean that the history, stories, and accomplishments of people with disabilities are more likely to be ignored, denied, rewritten, and ultimately lost.

To protect and preserve these aspects of who we are, it is essential that we find new ways to do so ourselves rather than depending on the government.

Perhaps one day after this administration has ended, we will have a renewed national effort to restore and fund DEI initiatives. In the meantime, we are on our own.

Sharing stories about people with disabilities, especially minorities with disabilities, is part of the reason *RESILIENCE* exists.

In this issue, we'll talk about a few other ways that people with disabilities and our supporters can keep such efforts alive.

..... - *Rick Bowers*

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Your Dreams Are Our Business

ENSURING OUR INCLUSION

In the Face of Political Attacks on DEI, Storytellers Strive to Ensure That People With Disabilities Are Not Excluded From the Public Square

By Becca Wake



Filmmaker B. Monét (right).
Photo by Lucas Talbert



Filmmaker B. Monét (wearing hat). Photo by Lucas Talbert

“When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.”

- Audre Lorde

The Trump administration's unyielding attacks on free speech and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in increasing areas of society threaten to exclude many faces and voices, especially those of minorities, immigrants, those with "unapproved" social and political views, and people with disabilities.

The president and his thought police have attacked the press, schools, museums, colleges, workplaces, stores, the military, the entertainment industry, and other areas of life, and there appears no end in sight.

This means that the history, stories, and accomplishments of people with disabilities are more likely to be ignored, denied, rewritten, and ultimately lost.

To protect and preserve these aspects of who we are, it is essential that we find new ways to do so ourselves rather than depending on the government.

Perhaps after this invasive administration has ended, there will be a renewed national effort to restore free speech and fund DEI initiatives. In the meantime, we are largely on our own.

The preceding quote from Audre Lorde is an excellent intro into why we need to be loud and strive to make a difference.

Fortunately, several leaders, storytellers, and filmmakers are striving to include people with disabilities in their work and advocacy efforts.

Committed to Minority Representation: Filmmaker B. Monét

B. Monét is “a visionary filmmaker whose commitment to the inclusion and representation of women with disabilities is both powerful and deeply intentional,” says Donna R. Walton, founder and CEO of The Divas With Disabilities Project (DWD), a nonprofit organization that serves black and brown women and girls with disabilities.

Monét is currently working on a short documentary about DWD and Walton, a cancer survivor, amputee, writer, actress, entrepreneur, and advocate for black and brown women and girls with physical disabilities. Walton, who holds a doctorate in rehabilitation counseling, has spent decades amplifying the voices of disabled women of color through storytelling, media, and mentorship.

The documentary is a portrait of a woman “whose advocacy has sparked a movement for visibility, elegance, and unapologetic self-expression among black and brown women with disabilities,” according to DWD.



Monét and Walton. Photo by Lucas Talbert

Filming is expected to be finalized in 2025 or 2026, according to Monét, whose goal is to premiere it at festivals and then pursue distribution through streaming platforms, educational circuits, and community screenings.

“Ultimately, I want the film to be accessible to as many audiences as possible,” she says.

According to Walton, “This documentary is more than a reflection of my journey. It’s a love letter to every disabled black woman who’s ever felt unseen. It’s about honoring our elegance, our resilience, and our right to take up space. I hope this film reminds people that disability is not a deficit—it’s a dimension of identity that deserves celebration.”

“B. Monét’s work is more than a film—it’s a call to action” according to DWD. “Her lens uplifts those who have long been overlooked, and her artistry ensures that their brilliance is not only seen, but celebrated.”

According to Monét, “These women’s energy, resilience, and creativity resonated deeply with me. It wasn’t just that their stories hadn’t been told on a large scale; it was that they were redefining what it means to be a diva, to own your power despite the world’s limitations. I knew immediately that I wanted to help spotlight them.”

This documentary is not Monét’s first effort to highlight the stories of marginalized groups and those who are often ignored. Monét, who has an MFA in Film & Television from New York University (NYU), has written and produced several films and documentaries and has won numerous awards.

Her short film Q.U.E.E.N., for example, received various honors, including winning the 2018 Best Graduate Feature Screenplay.



Monét working on *Ballet After Dark*.
Photo courtesy of B. Monét

Her documentary *Ballet After Dark* focused on dancer Tyde-Courtney Edwards, a black woman and sexual assault survivor who helps others find healing through dance. Edwards is the founding director of Ballet After Dark, a program whose mission is “providing arts and cultural programs, mental health resources, comprehensive education and activities that help Black and Brown girls and youth impacted by sexual violence and various traumas heal their minds and bodies with performing arts, holistic resources and somatic interventions.” (www.Balletafterdark.com)

Among Monét’s other works are *She’s Revolutionary*, which featured #MeToo founder Tarana Burke, and her first feature documentary film, *Black Girls*, exclusively streaming on Peacock, Xumo, and Xfinity.

Over the years, she’s worked with several stars and high-profile talents, including Rosario Dawson, Janet Jackson, Reese Witherspoon, and Queen Latifah.

“I’ve always been a storyteller at heart,” says Monét. “As a child, I escaped into books, built imaginary worlds, and leaned on creativity as a way to process life.”

Later, when she was studying abroad in Italy, one of her professor’s saw something in her and encouraged her to consider a film career.

“That was a pivotal moment,” she says. “Filmmaking felt like the most expansive medium to merge my love of words, visuals, and human connection. What motivated me was not just the art form itself, but the chance to leave behind stories that would outlive me—stories that matter, that affirm people who don’t always see themselves represented.

“Growing up as a black girl who ultimately became a black woman,” she continues, “I didn’t often see reflections of myself—my joy, my nuance, my struggles—portrayed with care or complexity. That absence shaped me. I wanted to create films that center voices that have historically been silenced or flattened. Over time, I’ve expanded that commitment to include not just race and gender, but also disability, sexuality, and other intersections of identity. For me, filmmaking is about making the invisible visible and the unheard undeniable.”

Today, Monét also works to inspire other marginalized people to become storytellers themselves. She provides mentorship, feedback, guidance on film treatments, film career consulting, and social media strategies for filmmakers and storytellers.



Monét (third from left) with *A Star Is Born* cast members. Photo courtesy of B. Monét

Monét also has plans to work on more films that include minority and marginalized communities.

“My slate includes both narrative and documentary work,” she says, “and the throughline is always the same: centering stories that have been overlooked. Whether I’m exploring themes of love, identity, or expansive worlds, my lens is shaped by identity and commitment to those communities. It’s not just a focus—it’s the foundation of my artistry.”

Unfortunately, the Trump administration’s anti-DEI policies have indirectly caused her and other filmmakers problems.

“There’s been a chilling effect,” she says. “Some funding streams have dried up or become more restrictive, and organizations that once prioritized equity and diversity now approach it more cautiously. While I haven’t personally had a grant revoked, I’ve certainly noticed fewer opportunities earmarked for diverse voices—and that shift impacts not only my work but the broader ecosystem of filmmakers like me. Our livelihood is entirely at risk, and it doesn’t seem like this administration cares at all.”

Still, she says, the administration’s policies are not stopping her.

“I’ve felt called to double down, not retreat,” she says. “If resources are shrinking, that only makes the work more urgent. Of course, I’ve had to be strategic—pairing passion projects with more commercial work to sustain myself—but my commitment to telling stories around persons within the African Diaspora hasn’t wavered. In fact, I see it as an act of resistance to continue amplifying these narratives despite political headwinds.”

“My hope is twofold,” says Monét: “first, to celebrate these women and give their brilliance the platform it deserves; and second, to expand the public imagination of what disability looks like. Too often, disability is framed in a negative light, giving little to no recognition to the disabled community. This project is about flipping that lens—showing glamour, ambition, laughter, leadership, and humanity.”



Walton. Photos by Lucas Talbert

Walton's Efforts to Showcase the Voices of Women With Disabilities

While Monét is helping tell Walton's story, Walton doesn't stop there. She's also been telling her own story and the stories of other black and brown women with disabilities for decades, primarily through her nonprofit organization. And she shows no signs of letting up.

Walton is currently co-producing a digital series called *Divas in the City*, which follows the lives of black women with disabilities taking their city by storm as they navigate life's challenges. The series is a celebration of unapologetic black and brown women with disabilities who are breaking barriers and living, loving, and leading authentically.

The goal of the series is to change the misconceptions of life as black women with disabilities and empower women with and without disabilities to be leaders and trendsetters.

Her organization is also collecting personal stories from black and brown women with disabilities to share.

"At Divas With Disabilities, we believe in the transformative power of storytelling," Walton says. "This campaign is a call to action for divas, supporters, and advocates to share personal stories that celebrate power, pride, resilience, joy, and legacy.

"These stories won't just be read—they'll be uplifted. Whether turned into mini films, featured in blogs, or woven into our ongoing documentary work and future exhibits, they will have the potential to reach hearts and change narratives.

"Together, we're building a vibrant archive of brilliance and bold visibility."

To find out how to share your story, [click here to visit https://divaswithdisabilities.org/share-your-story](https://divaswithdisabilities.org/share-your-story).

Regardless of government policies, which can vary from administration to administration, we have the talent and skills to control the narrative about our own lives and experiences.

To ensure that we don't get left out of the public square, we and our allies must continue to build these skills and the infrastructure to tell our own stories.

We must never simply leave our stories to the whims of others who don't care about us and our lives. That would be a tragic mistake.

What's Next?

Monét is currently seeking funding to complete post-production and bring this documentary film to the world. Click one of the links below if you'd like to donate to this film project or to The Divas With Disabilities Project.

[To specifically donate to the documentary film, click here.](#)

[To donate to The Divas With Disabilities Project, click here.](#)

Editor's Note: Monet's first feature documentary, *Black Girls*, is streaming on Peacock, Xumo, and Xfinity. In addition, her reimaged short film, *A Star Is Born*, is streaming through Warner Bros. Reframed: Next Gen Narratives on HBO Max.

(For more information about *Divas in the City*, [click here to visit https://divasinthecity.com](https://divasinthecity.com).

For more information about Walton, her co-producer Tameka Citchen-Spruce, and the series, visit <https://resiliencemag.com/resilience-issue-3a/> and read *Spotlight on Filmmaker Tameka Citchen-Spruce*.

For opportunities to share your talent, visit DWD's Casting Calls page at <https://divaswithdisabilities.org/resources>.

Organizations That Support Storytelling by People With Disabilities

[Shifting Creative Paradigms](https://shiftingcreativeparadigms.com) <https://shiftingcreativeparadigms.com>

[Disability Belongs](https://disabilitybelongs.org) <https://disabilitybelongs.org>

[The Divas With Disabilities Project](https://divaswithdisabilities.org) <https://divaswithdisabilities.org>

[Women of Color Unite \(WOCU\)](https://wocunite.org) <https://wocunite.org>

[Anarchists United Foundation](https://anarchists-united.org) <https://anarchists-united.org>

[StoryCorps](https://storycorps.org) <https://storycorps.org> (See following story.)



Walton. Photo by Lucas Talbert



The Story of StoryCorps

Recording Conversations Between Everyday Americans

StoryCorps — the national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people believe in each other by illuminating the humanity and possibility in us all, one story at a time — is traveling to various cities to record the stories of Americans. Participants will have the option of recording in person or remotely, using StoryCorps' free recording tools.

“For two decades, the StoryCorps Mobile Tour has traveled the country to preserve and amplify the voices of everyday Americans, those least likely to be recorded in history books or heard in the media,” said StoryCorps CEO Sandra M. Clark.

“Every time we stop in a town or city, we see how a conversation between people about their lives forges and strengthens connections and communities and helps fortify the social fabric of our nation. We’re proud to continue this journey and grateful to the local participants and partners who join us in our effort to grow our vast archive of American voices and illuminate the possibility in us all.”

During a StoryCorps interview, two people record a meaningful conversation about who they are, what they’ve learned in life, and how they want to be remembered. A trained StoryCorps facilitator guides them through the interview process step by step and after each 40-minute recording session, participants can access the interview through [StoryCorps’ free Online Archive](#). With participant permission, their conversation is also archived at the [Library of Congress’s American Folklife Center](#) for future generations to enjoy and learn from.

StoryCorps may also share edited versions of select interviews collected throughout the tour via its [NPR broadcasts, podcast, animated shorts, digital platforms, and best-selling books](#).

On the Mobile Tour, facilitated recording sessions are offered to the public free of charge and can be booked online at storycorps.org/mobile-tour. Reservations are usually available approximately two weeks before the Mobile Booth’s arrival in each location.

StoryCorps also partners with local public radio stations, which air a selection of the interviews (with participant permission). In many cases, the stations also create special programs around the project.

Since 2005, the Mobile Tour has recorded thousands of meaningful conversations in cities and towns in all 50 U.S. states. It plays a critical role in realizing StoryCorps' mission by bringing the experience directly to individuals and the communities where they live.

These powerful human stories reflect the vast range of American experiences, engender empathy and connection, and remind us how much more we have in common than what divides us. StoryCorps is especially committed to capturing and amplifying voices least heard in the media.

The StoryCorps MobileBooth, an Airstream trailer that has been transformed into a traveling recording booth, crosses the country year-round gathering the stories of people nationwide.

Upon arrival to a location, the MobileBooth parks at a collaborating local cultural institution or community-based organization to help encourage participation.

StoryCorps Remaining Mobile Tour Schedule 2025

November 25–December 21, 2025 / Dallas-Fort Worth, TX / KERA Public Radio

Learn more at storycorps.org.

Editor's Note: StoryCorps has recorded the stories of many people with disabilities. You can find stories in the StoryCorps archive at <https://archive.storycorps.org/search/interviews> by searching the term “disability” or “disabilities”.

Also, a StoryCorps podcast episode on people with disabilities can be listened to at <https://storycorps.org/podcast/the-way-i-am>

Join our community and movement for black
and **brown** girls and women with disabilities.

Showing up ***unapologetically***
to reshape what
disability looks like

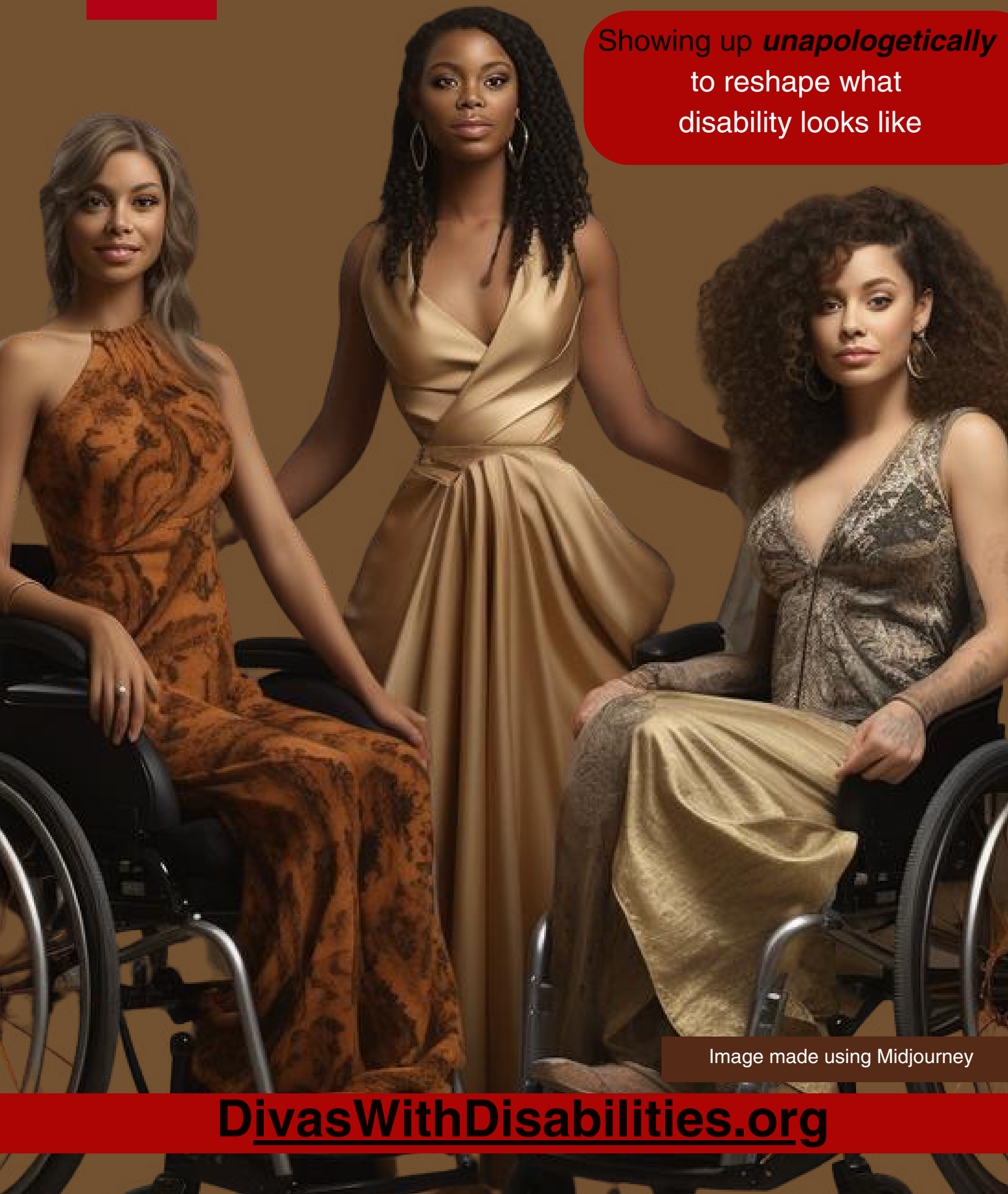


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DivasWithDisabilities.org

We Are **DIVAS**

Dynamic

Illuminating

Victorious

Achieving

Sisters

[Click here or anywhere on the image below to watch a brief video about Divas With Disabilities](#)

We Are Divas  With Disabilities

THE DIVAS WITH DISABILITIES PROJECT

▶ ● 0:00 / 1:54 🔊 🔍



Illustration made using Midjourney

Visit Our Divas With Disabilities Blog_ **for Black and Brown Women Today**

There, we post various articles, announcements and other information of interest to Divas.

Be sure to check back from time to time to see what's happening in Divas World.

[Click here to visit the blog now.](#)

Our articles are:

[Introducing Michelle Colon: A Woman With Many Talents](#)

[RESILIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE IN OVERCOMING LIFE'S CHALLENGES](#)

[BORN OF SERVICE, RAISED IN STRENGTH](#)

[Zazel O'Garra: Reclaiming the Spotlight Through Resilience and Dance](#)

[The Invisible Ones: Shedding Light on Non-Obvious Disabilities](#)

[The Day That Changed My Life](#)

[Representation and Belonging: Black and Brown Women with Disabilities in Media and Beyond](#)

Latino Exercise Focus Group Leaps Into Virtual Reality

Researchers Listen and Learn as Latino Community Members Evaluate Virtual Reality Dance Exercise

In a community center conference room tucked into the heart of Los Angeles, the scene might look a little strange at first: People moving side to side and back and forth, waving their arms. But there's no music playing and no dance instructor in sight.

That's because the rhythm and instruction are happening in virtual reality.

The dancers are participating in a focus group organized by Cedars-Sinai researchers who are launching Movement Over Virtual Reality (MoVR), a physical activity program aimed at helping Latinos reduce their risk for obesity and Type 2 diabetes through Latin dance-inspired VR exercise.



“We think this community is being left out of this amazing technology that can be fun and engaging,” said Yelba Castellon-Lopez, MD, research scientist in the Castellon-Lopez Lab at the Cancer Research Center for Health Equity at Cedars-Sinai and the study’s principal investigator. “Our goal is to bring that to the community.”

MoVR builds on the proven success of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Diabetes Prevention Program, a yearlong lifestyle intervention that recommends 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week.

But for many Latinos, regular gym or outdoor exercise isn’t always realistic.



“Some participants have said they work all day, come home late, and don’t feel safe walking in their neighborhood parks,” Castellon-Lopez said. “They see this as a way to overcome that barrier—exercising in a fully immersive way, but in the safety of their own home.”

So far, more than 100 Angelenos have participated in MoVR focus groups, which are conducted in both English and Spanish and divided by age. Participants, ranging from ages 18-70, wear virtual reality headsets and follow energetic dance routines set in vibrant virtual environments—no travel or gym membership required.

“I really like it,” said participant Julia Hernandez. “Maybe my kids will want to try, too. If they see me exercising, they might say, ‘Oh, Mama, I want to do that!’ I think it could be good for my whole family.”

Another participant, Evelyn Pacas, said the experience went beyond physical benefits.

“Besides getting some exercise and breaking a sweat, I laughed a lot—and laughter helps lift your spirits,” she said. “It was just 10 minutes, but imagine how much better I’d feel doing this more regularly at home.”

After Castellon-Lopez and team review the focus groups' results, they plan to begin a new study in which participants would get their own VR goggles to work out with in their own homes.

“The goal isn’t to replace going outside for a walk,” Castellon-Lopez said. “It’s to offer an additional tool — something culturally relevant, safe and motivating — to help people live healthier lives.”

This article was adapted from information provided by Cedars-Sinai.



Lonely Adults May Have a Higher Risk of Diabetes

Socially isolated older adults are at increased risk of developing diabetes and high blood sugar, according to a study presented in July 2025.

“Social isolation and loneliness have been increasingly recognized as important health risk factors after the COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings underscore the importance for clinicians to recognize social isolation as a critical social determinant of health when caring for older patients,” said lead researcher Samiya Khan, MD, of the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, California. “These findings are especially relevant given the rapidly growing aging population in the United States and globally, alongside the widespread prevalence of social isolation and loneliness among older adults.”

Unfortunately, it has also been noted that people with disabilities experience loneliness more than the general population, which could increase their risk.



Image produced using Artbreeder

Khan noted that while a few previous studies have explored the connection between social isolation and diabetes, this study is among the first to examine its link to poor glycemic control using a nationally representative sample—data that reflects the broader U.S. population. This makes the findings applicable on a national scale.

Khan and her team analyzed data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) from 2003-2008. NHANES is a comprehensive survey program designed to assess the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the U.S.

The researchers studied data from 3,833 adults aged 60 to 84, representing about 38 million older people in the U.S. After adjusting for other factors, they found that socially isolated older adults were 34% more likely to have diabetes and 75% more likely to have poor blood sugar control than those who were not isolated. This suggests that social isolation may be an important but often overlooked risk factor for diabetes and poor blood sugar management in older adults.

“These findings underscore the importance of social connections for the wellbeing of older adults,” Khan said. “Physicians should recognize social isolation as a potential risk factor among elderly patients for both diabetes and high blood sugar.”

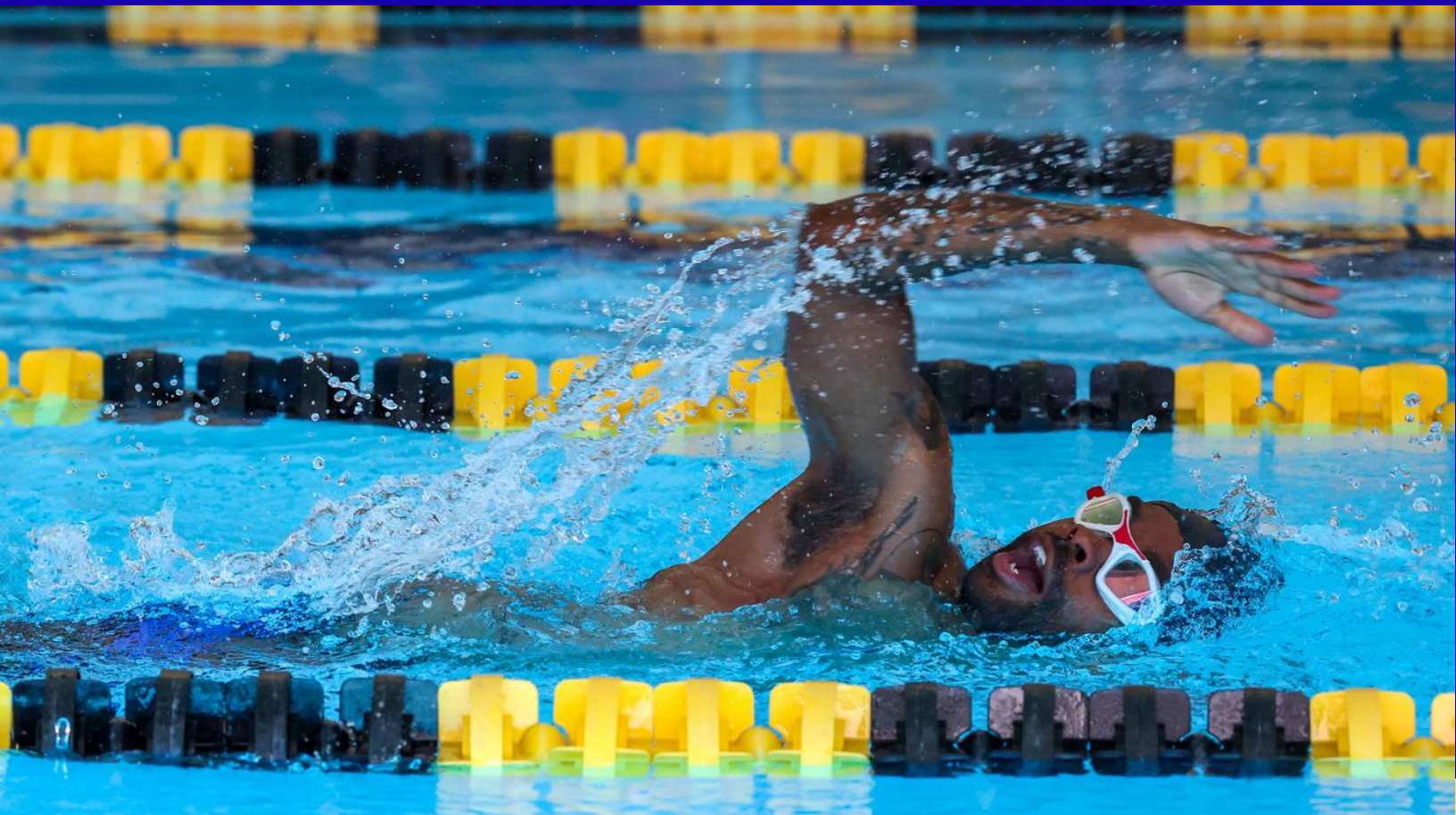
This article is adapted from information provided by the Endocrine Society.

Warrior Games 2025

July 18-26, Colorado Springs, Colorado

At the 2025 Department of Defense (DoD) Warrior Games, men and women from the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and U.S. Special Operations Command competed in the following adaptive sports: archery, cycling, field, indoor rowing, powerlifting, precision air, sitting volleyball, swimming, track, wheelchair basketball, and wheelchair rugby.

Following are the background stories of two participants in this year's Games.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Paris Maxey.

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Allaijah Churchwell competes in the swimming event during the 2025 DoD Warrior Games July 26.

Finding His Way Back

On December 9, 2023, Staff Sgt. Allaijah Churchwell was doing one of his favorite things taking his daily walk.

As he was going along, mentally focused on how he would carry out his task for his unit that day, he was suddenly struck by another service member riding on an E- bike.

“I broke five ribs, ruptured my spleen, and two femur bones,” said Churchwell. “It was truly devastating, and I felt really isolated after I was injured. Then I came to the Soldier Recovery Unit [SRU], and those feelings of isolation and loneliness started to go away.”

Churchwell has dedicated nine years to the Army with deployments to Poland in 2018 and Australia in 2023 under his belt.

Although he is originally from Wahiawa, Hawaii, it wasn't until he arrived at the Schofield barracks Hawaii SRU that he found a new passion and purpose there through adaptive sports.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Paris Maxey.

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Allaijah Churchwell competes in the qualification round with a recurve bow at the archery event during the 2025 DoD Warrior Games July 24, 2025.

“I wish more people knew about the [adaptive sports] program,” he explained. “I know it is known within the Army and the public knows about it, but I hope it gets more attention for all the great work they are doing. They have helped me grow mentally, physically, and even spiritually. I am practicing yoga now too.

“My first sergeant told me the program would help me get back into the fight, and he was right,” said Churchwell.

The Army Recovery Program has a diverse range of activities and programs for soldiers within the SRU that allows military members and veterans to become active acquire education, participate in career continuation programs, and pursue opportunities to advance their education toward new careers.

The opportunity to compete as an athlete through adaptive sports creates opportunities that make the journey for many soldiers’ recovery life changing.



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Samuel Signor.

Churchwell crosses the finish line in the men's 200-meter sprint during the track event at the 2025 DoD Warrior Games.

“Bringing everybody together from all different branches, competitions like the DoD Warrior Games is a beautiful sight, and I hope they continue it, and I hope to compete for years to come,” said Churchwell. At this year's DoD Warrior Games, Churchwell was scheduled to compete in archery, field, swimming, track, wheelchair basketball, and wheelchair rugby.

At one point, he was physically knocked down, causing him severe injuries and mental turmoil, but he got back up and chose to get back in the fight and walk with a renewed sense of purpose.



U.S. Army photo by
Sgt. Paris Maxey

Churchwell moves
down the court
during a wheelchair
basketball game at
the 2025 DoD
Warrior Games

“I can’t thank the SRU enough for walking side by side with me,” he added. “It has been an awesome journey to recovery, and my future seems so bright now.”

For more information about the 2025 DoD Warrior Games, go to <https://dodwarriorgames.com>.

Adapted from an original story by Kyra Davenport, Army Recovery Care Program.

The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

Sergeant Says Military Health System Team ‘Changed My Life’

After U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Aaron Lin cleared landmines from an Iraqi neighborhood in 2008, a local resident came up and reached out his hand.

“Thank you for making my neighborhood safe for my grandkids,” the man told the explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technician.

It was a moment of gratitude and trust that Lin carried with him throughout his deployment.

“I thought to myself, I could do this job for the rest of my life,” he said. “We were disarming 10 improvised explosive devices a day ... trip wires, landmines, pressure plates, anything you could think of. I was supremely confident.”

But an attack on his unit during another deployment in Afghanistan took a toll on him.

“All that confidence I had just went to the basement. It just bottomed out.”

He would begin to suffer an injury with no visible scars: post-traumatic stress disorder. It was Lin’s turn to reach out — and his leadership, family, and professionals in the Military Health System (MHS) took his hand.

Attack on March 30, 2010

Lin and his team were disarming IEDs on foot when an explosion ripped through their patrol. Two of his friends were killed. He felt immense guilt that he survived when others died.

“I got blown up a couple times, but that part didn’t really bother me,” he said. “What bothered me is we had a couple casualties that day. I should have died out there with them.”

Lin said the motto of EOD training, “initial success or total failure,” haunted him as he felt like “a complete failure.”

He returned home, but not the same. Even in joyous moments, he felt nothing.

“I was numb,” Lin said. “I could not feel closeness to my wife. I just couldn’t feel anything.”

He deployed again but was “running away from my problems and everything.”

When he returned home this time, he experienced depression and detachment and suffered nightmares.

It was a “a pain that I can't describe,” he said. “But I could feel it in my heart.”

A Sergeant Intervenes

Lin, then stationed at Joint Base Andrews, was struggling as new deployment orders to Syria fast approached.

“I could not handle it. I was not sleeping and having nightmares every other night.”

A unit leader noticed Lin was struggling. According to Lin, he was doing the “first sergeant thing” by simply asking if he was OK.

“I was like, ‘I’m fine, I’m fine. I don’t need any help,’” said Lin.

But the first sergeant could tell he wasn’t fine. At his encouragement, Lin decided to go to the mental health clinic.

That intervention led to six weeks of intensive outpatient treatment at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. There, he was diagnosed with PTSD and started a comprehensive treatment plan under the care of his MHS team.

“They had a schedule for me printed out for the whole six weeks,” he said. “Cognitive processing therapy, yoga, art, sleep classes, group therapy ... it helped me to start looking at things differently. It’s basically anything you can think of to help yourself work through it.”

He credits the Fort Belvoir care team with saving his life. “That intensive outpatient truly changed me ... I came out of it so much better than I was before.”

Lin was so inspired by the acts of the first sergeant that he applied to be one himself.

“When he pushed me to go to mental health, I decided that I wanted to become a first sergeant so I could pay it forward and help other people,” he said.

Like his former first sergeant, he encouraged those who seemed to be struggling to seek help. Yet an attempted suicide in Lin’s unit brought back the negative thoughts of doubt and self-worth.

“All those feelings that I got back while I was deployed: ‘What could I have done different?’ I thought I did everything that I possibly could to prevent that. I began to plummet again.”

‘Warrior Mindset and Perseverance

While Lin continued mental health treatment, a friend and fellow EOD technician convinced him to give the Air Force Wounded Warrior Program a chance.

Lin questioned whether he deserved to be in the program. “I’m not missing a limb,” he said. “I don’t think I belong.”

But seeing the other wounded warriors sharing their own stories, Lin decided to try out for Team Air Force. “I found something that helped me reconnect,” Lin said. “Being with other warriors who understood; it gave me a path forward.”

“I found the power of sports, competing, striving for something,” Lin said. “And just being with the Air Force Wounded Warrior community and all my warrior friends who were struggling too, it changed me.”

In March 2024, he earned a spot on Team Air Force at the Department of Defense (DOD) Warrior Games. He went on to earn silver medals in wheelchair basketball and rugby.

His new passion for athletics didn’t stop there. At trials and competitions throughout the year, Lin medaled in air pistol, placed in archery, and excelled in discus, shot put, and rowing.

In the 2024 DOD Warrior Games, he recalled a moment where he channeled his “warrior mindset” when his rowing team was facing last place in competition.

“When I was in Afghanistan and Iraq, you had to have that warrior mindset,” Lin said. “If your team is down, you still have to push through, whether that’s on the field of sports or the field of battle.”

He leveraged the experience of his own journey to encourage his team to persevere.

“We are not representing the Air Force like this,” he told the team. “We pulled each other up and ended up coming back and getting bronze. That bronze felt like gold.”

Out of competition, Lin gave back. He has mentored adaptive sports athletes and has helped several make Team Air Force. He shared his journey as an Air Force Wounded Warrior ambassador, speaking at events to fellow service members around the country. He encourages fellow service members to reach out to local mental-health clinics, chaplains, or inpatient care, and shares resources such as Military OneSource for support.

Even with all the support from his healthcare team, the Wounded Warrior program, and friends, Lin stresses his wife has been his strongest form of support, “100%.”

“She’s my caregiver. She reminds me to take my medicine, grounds me when I wake up from night terrors. She’s the reason I can do what I do,” he said. “What’s most important is you and your family. That’s forever.”

He said the warrior mindset is not about perfection, “It’s about heart and perseverance.”

Lighting the Path Forward

Since 2024, Lin has been promoted to senior master sergeant, has received his master’s degree, and has been named Air Force Male Athlete of the Year.

He was also chosen to compete in the 2025 DOD Warrior Games and was chosen by his teammates to represent his team as a torchbearer.

“They entrusted me to be the warrior spirit of the team,” he said. “I don’t take that lightly.”

Lin hopes his story encourages others to ask for help and stay the course.

“When you or your team gets knocked down, you got to get back up. Got to do it again. Got to try again.”

Lin said he continues to push forward. Still serving. Still finishing the mission — thanks to the care of his MHS team.

“I wish I had sought help earlier, but I’m here now, and I’m better for it,” Lin said. “Our healthcare system really didn’t turn me away. I’m grateful for that. Even though I didn’t feel like I deserved the help, they didn’t turn me away. They took care of my concerns and took me seriously. I probably wouldn’t be where I am at today if it wasn’t for the military healthcare system and Air Force Wounded Warrior Program.”

For more information about the 2025 DoD Warrior games, go to <https://dodwarriorgames.com>.

This article was adapted from an original story by Robert Hammer, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs/Military Health System.

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U.S. Air Force photo by Joshua J. Garcia, 502nd Air Base Wing.

At a previous event, United States Marine Corp Maj. Taylor Hershberger and United States Air Force Master Sgt. Aaron Lin light the USAF and USMC Wounded Warrior Trials cauldron during the opening ceremony at Rambler Gym on Joint Base San Antonio – Randolph, March, 14, 2025. The trials hosted wounded warrior athletes from the USAF, USMC, United States Army, England's British Armed Forces, and members of the Defense Force of Georgia.

News, Stories, and Research You Might Have Missed

The following links are to press releases and media reports that might not have been widely publicized but that include information relevant to people with disabilities.

NOTE: Clicking on the links will take you away from this publication to another website.



Image made using Midjourney

Weightlifting beats running for blood sugar control, researchers find

<https://tinyurl.com/weightliftmore> (November 5, 2025)

New model shows how treating diabetes early makes a difference

<https://tinyurl.com/earlydifference> (October 30, 2025)

Defying the Odds: Father's Love Leads to Life-Changing Surgery

<https://tinyurl.com/fatherdefy> (June 12, 2025)

It's not the pain, it's the mindset: How attitude outweighs pain

<https://tinyurl.com/painattitude> (October 23, 2025)

Boys Don't Cry? How picture books can teach gendered ideas about pain

<https://tinyurl.com/crypicture> (October 27, 2025)

New Law to Help Patients Avoid Medication Errors

<https://tinyurl.com/avoiderror> (October 27, 2025)