October is Metropolitan State University’s Disability Awareness Month

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Contributor

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October is Metropolitan State University’s Disability Services Awareness month, as well as the National Disability Employment Awareness month. According to the World Health Organization, the term “disabilities” includes three aspects: impairment, defined as “a problem in body function or structure”; activity limitation, “a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action”; and participation restriction, “a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.”

There are many different types of disabilities, and according to the US Census Bureau’s 2013 American Community Survey, 12.7 percent of Americans have a disability. At Metropolitan State, there are 345 students with disabilities, and as of 2014, 28 percent had mental health illnesses, 17 percent had learning disabilities, 10 percent had chronic disabilities and three percent had brain injuries. These numbers may be even higher, as not every student with a disability is registered with the university’s disability services office.

In order to raise awareness of disabilities, Metro will host a series of events for the community. On Oct. 15, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Beth Finke will be on campus for a book signing and to speak about her disability. Finke is blind, but doesn’t let that get in the way of her aspirations. She has been on National Public Radio and has authored a number of works including “Long Time, No See” and “Safe and Sound.” In addition, she was awarded an American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Henry Bergh Award.

On Oct. 21, a panel of professionals with disabilities will speak to the Metro community. Panelists will include Deana Langton, of the South Minneapolis Workforce Center; Steve Anderson, the director of Disability Resources at Hamline University; and a representative from the Fraser Institute.

Eve Nichols is the director of Metro’s Disability Services. Nichols believes that the events in October will help reduce the stigma surrounding disabilities. “Anytime we see individuals with disabilities living on their own, having jobs, that does raise awareness,” she explains. “It raises awareness that people with disabilities can earn their own living, they can make their own decisions and they can take care of themselves.”

This December, after working in disability services since 1987, Nichols will retire. She says her job was “never boring” because her role was constantly changing. Metro’s disability services office provides numerous strategies for student success, including access to courses, test proctoring, note-taking assistance, advocacy and assistive technology.

To learn more about the university’s disability services, call the office at 651-793-1549 or visit their website at metrostate.edu/msweb/pathway/academic\_success/disability/