Reaching a Local Audience

Here's how we shared our message in St. Louis:

- SDI was honored with a “What’s Right with the Region!” award from FOCUS St. Louis, the region’s premier leadership organization. We were cited for making a positive impact in the category of Social Justice and Racial Equality and for showing “a commitment to promoting diversity, access and opportunity for all.”

- An exhibit, Max Starkloff: A Retrospective, at the Bruno David Gallery in Grand Center, brought 1,500 visitors to the gallery in a 3 month period. The stunning paintings by the late Max Starkloff reminded the public in a powerful way that no person with a disability should ever be reduced to just a disability.

- KSDK news anchor Mike Bush told the compelling story of the Next Big Step, our signature program, on his Making a Difference segment. The 4-minute piece aired during the 10 p.m. newscast on Sunday, June 7, to an audience of hundreds of thousands of viewers, who now know that SDI and its investors are, in fact, “making a difference.”

- SDI presented the Honorable Tony Coelho, former United States congressman from California and primary sponsor of the Americans with Disabilities Act, who served as keynote speaker at ADA 25 STL: A 25th Anniversary Celebration. This event, presented by SDI, on the lawn of the Missouri History Museum, drew a crowd in celebration of the progress that has been made in breaking down the barriers to the full inclusion of people with disabilities.

Reaching a National Audience

We made a splash on the national stage as well:

- Colleen Starkloff and her daughter, Meaghan Breitenstein reached thousands of listeners when they were featured on National Public Radio’s StoryCorps on January 16, 2015. The 3-minute segment on the Starkloff family played twice on Morning Edition, the most-listened-to news radio program in the country.

- Max Starkloff and the Fight for Disability Rights, authored by Charles E. Claggett, Jr. and Richard Weiss, garnered two awards—a national Bronze IPPY Award in the biography category and an Award of Merit in Publications from the American Association for State and Local History.

- As part of the national commemoration of the passage of the ADA, SDI Founder, David Newburger offered a presentation about the role of ADA Coordinators at the National Symposium in Atlanta, Georgia. The audience of over 120 public and private ADA Coordinators from across the country benefited from his expertise.

- The 25th anniversary of the ADA pre-empted our biennial Universal Design Summit, but SDI Founder, Colleen Starkloff, addressed hundreds of participants on the subject at the National ADA Symposium, calling on more municipalities and organizations to embrace design standards that benefit all people.

- And, finally in December, SDI received national recognition when the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation awarded us a Quality of Life Grant. These grants support nonprofit organizations that improve quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families by fostering opportunities for community engagement and other life-enhancing endeavors.
This blitz of community education fosters the success of SDI's signature program, the Next Big Step, an employment initiative designed to promote economic independence by addressing the barriers to employment facing people with disabilities. Community investors make the program possible, corporate partners make it uniquely successful, and our graduates sustain the momentum. Each person who enters the workforce becomes an ambassador for our view of disability. While someone with a disability may use technology to do the job in a different way, everyone reports to work for the same reasons. Barriers come down as people with disabilities become nothing more and nothing less than capable, competent co-workers.

The students who participate in our Disability Studies Initiative have a similar impact in educating the community. At Maryville University, where SDI's Steve Foelsch teaches classes designed at SDI, students are also exposed to our view of disability as a fact to be recognized and not a problem to be solved. These individuals graduate prepared to become the next generation of Disability Rights advocates. Over the years, several hundred students—our foot soldiers—have entered employment settings, ranging from nursing, to occupational therapy, to social work. They play an on-going role in creating welcoming communities.

As you can see, we grabbed the bullhorn in 2015—an appropriate gesture in an anniversary year in the long journey toward the full participation of people with disabilities. As more people hear about us, we hope they will know what you have known and support our work. Together, we have truly made a difference in the lives of people with disabilities, and we thank you!
2015 by the numbers...

Number of Donors: 221

Total Revenue: $687,000

Total Expenditures: $661,000

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