10th World Down Syndrome Day Conference

Session 2

#CONNECT in Education – the importance of inclusion and connection in education - barriers, solutions and COVID-19

Virtual event
Thursday 18th March 2021 – 10:00 AM EDT/2:00 PM UTC
World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD)

WDSD is a global awareness day recognised since 2012 by the UN, which takes place on 21 March every year. 21 March, or 21:3, signifies the triplication of chromosome 21, unique to persons with Down syndrome. On 19 December 2011, the United Nations General Assembly declared 21 March as World Down Syndrome Day (A/RES/66/149).

Summary of event

10th World Down Syndrome Day Conference – #CONNECT in Education – the importance of inclusion and connection in education - barriers, solutions and COVID-19

On Wednesday 17th, Thursday 18th and Friday 19th March join DSi online as we host our 10th annual World Down Syndrome Day Conference as a series of virtual events.

Speakers will include people with Down syndrome, supporters and advocates, government and UN officials and NGO representatives. They will share their experiences, knowledge and expertise, bringing perspectives from around the world.

Session 2 will explore the vision of inclusive education, the challenges faced in its realisation and the effect of COVID-19 on education around the world.

We will see experiences, information and examples of good practice in inclusive education during COVID-19 and innovative strategies for inclusive education during the COVID-19 recovery and beyond.

DSi is grateful to our sponsors the Permanent Missions of Australia, Brazil, Japan, Mexico, and Poland to the United Nations in New York and to UNICEF and the International Disability Alliance.
Participants

Moderator: Sheri Brynard - Assistant teacher and national chairperson for the self-advocates of Down Syndrome South Africa

Speakers: Ruth Warick - First Vice-President of the International Disability Alliance
‘Inclusive education for All’

UNESCO – video
‘Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2021 Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia: Armenia’. The video shows an inclusive school in Armenia and contains key messages from their GEM Report on inclusion and education.

Penny Robertson OAM - Founder and CEO of the Australian International Schools in Jakarta and Bali in Indonesia
‘Inclusive education and the effects of COVID-19’

Ronrigo Mendes - Founder and CEO of the Rodrigo Mendes Institute
‘Protocols on inclusive education during the COVID-19 pandemic’

Dr Paula Kluth - Researcher/consultant and author
‘#All in: Connecting in the Distance Learning Classroom’

Dr Rhonda Faragher -
Down Syndrome International and The University of Queensland, Australia
‘The effect of COVID-19 on people with disabilities and what needs to happen now’

Sociedad Peruana de Síndrome Down
Aime Apaza - Graduate in Psychology at National University of San Marcos
‘Opportunities in virtual education for students with Down syndrome’

Ximena Rodriguez - Self-advocate of the Sociedad Peruana de Síndrome Down
‘Connectivity opportunities to improve post-secondary education and social participation for people with Down syndrome’

Inclusive Solutions - Skopje, Macedonia
Speakers - self-advocates and advocates
Un-lockDown: write for the site and Zoom from your room.

Olivier Bernier – Director, Producer, Editor of FORGET ME NOT
Co-Founder & Creative Director of Rota6 Films
‘A look at the upcoming feature documentary, Forget Me Not, a film about inclusive education

Paul Sawka - Awareness Leader for the Canadian Down Syndrome Society
‘COVID-19’s Impact on my University Education’

Closing remarks: Andrew Boys - Executive Director of Down Syndrome International
Speaker Bios

Olivier Bernier
Director, Producer, Editor of FORGET ME NOT, Co-Founder & Creative Director of Rota6 Films, United States

Award winning Director, Olivier Bernier lives and breathes to tell stories that explore the human condition and put a hyper focus on topics that can change the way we look at the world. Part American, part Quebecois, Olivier is also the Co-Founder and Creative Director of the production company, Rota6 Films, specializing in documentary and commercial films. Olivier’s here to present his latest project, the feature documentary titled Forget Me Not.

FORGET ME NOT is an immersive film that looks at the current state of inclusive education in America from the perspective of families advocating to have the children included.

Following the journey of the director’s own son, Emilio, from the day he was born with Down syndrome, we get an intimate glimpse into the struggle to have children included. At the same time, the film explores the success of students that have had the opportunity to be included.

The goal of the film is to make the concept of inclusion accessible to a wide audience and inspire them to help break down the barriers that keep children from being included in their schools today.

Andrew Boys
Executive Director, Down Syndrome International, United Kingdom

Andrew Boys has been the Executive Director of Down Syndrome International since the launch of the DSi secretariat in 2009 in the UK, working with DSi’s Board of Trustees to establish a global membership network in 140 countries, promoting the inherent right of people with Down syndrome to be accepted and included as valued and equal members of their communities.

For the last 9 years, Andrew has led DSi’s World Down Syndrome Day campaign, including the global sharing website www.worlddownsyndromeday.org, WDSD global video event and the successful WDSD Conferences following the UN General Assembly resolution (passed in December 2011) officially recognizing WDSD on 21 March each year.

Andrew established DSi’s “global support” training programs to enable people with Down syndrome facing limited life opportunities, their families and those who live and work with them, to access expert advice, information, support and resources, with successful projects taking place in Tajikistan, Oman, India, Rwanda, Peru, Turkey and Nigeria to date.

In a former life Andrew was a chartered surveyor in London. Andrew’s younger brother Alex is a motivated, independent young man ...he also has Down syndrome.

Shéri Brynard
Assistant teacher and national chairperson for the self-advocates of Down Syndrome South Africa

Shéri Brynard is the only person with Down syndrome in South Africa who has a tertiary teacher’s diploma without any amendments been made to the course, in South Africa. Sheri has also been chosen by her Down syndrome peers as their official South African spokesperson and she is the South African representative on the Down syndrome international Forum, for adults with Down syndrome.

She truly believes that all people have the responsibility to strive to make the best of their circumstances and she is a living example thereof. The University of the Free State has invited Shéri to assist in a project to
motivate learners in schools for disadvantaged learners in the Free State (before Covid-19). She is currently also a full time qualified assistant teacher at a Primary school for learners with special educational needs and she still presents motivational speeches all over the world virtually.

Shéri strives to change negative perceptions about people with Down syndrome and she actively advocates for the rights of all people with any disadvantage to be granted the same opportunities they would have had if they were more privileged. Although she is intellectually disabled and was educated in our Afrikaans language, she succeeded in learning to speak English in order to reach more people with her story of hope. When she grew up there was little or no support in the form of therapy, etc. available in South Africa. Shéri wrote a book about her life and the manuscript was accepted and published. The book has been launched internationally in English and also in Afrikaans locally. Sheri is currently the co-presenter of her own radio show, in Bloemfontein. She invites well known guests to tell the listeners about themselves and the work they do.

Dr Rhonda Faragher, PhD
Down Syndrome International and The University of Queensland, Australia

Dr Rhonda Faragher is the Director of the Down Syndrome Research Program at The University of Queensland in Australia where she is an Associate Professor in Inclusive Education. She has internationally recognised expertise in the mathematics education of learners with Down syndrome. She is a Trustee of Down Syndrome International and an Independent Director of Down Syndrome Australia. She is an appointed Board member to the Academy on Education, Teaching and Research of IASSIDD - the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Chair of the Down Syndrome Special Interest Research Group of IASSIDD, and the Co-Editor in Chief of the Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities. Dr Faragher is a Fellow of IASSIDD and Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. She has received a number of awards for her work including the 2020 University of Queensland Staff Award for Excellence in Community, Diversity and Inclusion, the 2016 ACU Vice-Chancellor's Medal for Staff Excellence, and a Commonwealth of Australia Endeavour Executive Award.

Inclusive Solutions – Skopje, Macedonia

“Un-lockDown: Zoom from your room and write on the site” is a project of Inclusive Solutions - Skopje, a Macedonian organisation that promotes social inclusion. It is as collaborative initiative, envisioned by siblings of people with Down syndrome and high school students, and includes self-advocates and members of different Macedonian organizations such as “Trisomija 21-Skopje” and “Doza Srekja”. Self-advocates interviewed in the video:

Ilina Georgieva, 17-year old high school student who is an avid swimmer and dancer

Nikola Kolev, a 30-year old man who lately enjoys gardening, playing the guitar and creating computer images.

Other self-advocates and contributors in the video: Nikola Stojanovski, Julijana Petrovska, Kristijan Stojanov, Kosta Arizanov

The project has been led by:

Rosica Koleva, sister of a young man with Down syndrome, president of “Inclusive Solutions Skopje” and inclusive education specialist. She is responsible for organising and moderating the Zoom events

Jana Ognjanovska, a final year student at NOVA International High School in Skopje. She is responsible for updating the website.
Dr Paula Kluth, Researcher/consultant and author, United States

Dr. Paula Kluth is a consultant, author, advocate, and independent scholar who works with teachers and families to provide inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities and to create more responsive and engaging schooling experiences for all learners. She is a former K-12 special educator who has served as a classroom teacher, co-teacher, and inclusion facilitator. Paula has also been a university professor and has taught courses on both inclusion and disability studies. Most recently, Paula’s work has centered on helping teachers and administrators educate all students in their schools and classrooms. She also frequently works with families and advocacy groups to support goals related to inclusion. In addition to inclusive education, her professional interests include Universal Design for Learning, co-teaching, and educating students with complex support needs. All In: 18 Ways to Include All Students in Virtual Classrooms is Paula’s newest book. She is also the author or co-author of 15 other titles including Universal Design Daily, 30 Days to the Co-Taught Classroom, Don’t We Already Do Inclusion?, and “You’re Going to Love This Kid!”: Teaching Students with Autism in Inclusive Classrooms. She is also the author of a few books for children including Coaster, a story of a puppy with wonderful wheels.

Paula has won several awards in her field. She is the recipient of the PEAK Parent Center’s Ally for Inclusion Award; The PEAL [Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership] Center’s Inclusive Education Champion Award; The National Down Syndrome Congress’s Educator of the Year; The Belle Center of Chicago’s Inclusion Advocate of the Year; and the University of Wisconsin’s “Forward Under 40” Award.

Rodrigo Hübner Mendes
Founder and CEO of the Rodrigo Mendes Institute, Brazil

Rodrigo Hübner Mendes is the Founder and the CEO of the Rodrigo Mendes Institute whose mission is to guarantee that every child with disability has access to quality education in mainstream schools. The Institute develops programs in several countries. Hübner Mendes is a Young Global Leader (World Economic Forum) and a fellow of Ashoka. He has been working as a consultant for UNESCO and for The Government of Angola. In 2017, Rodrigo became the first person to drive a race car with the mind.

Penny Robertson OAM
Founder and CEO of the Australian International Schools in Jakarta and Bali in Indonesia, Australia

Penny Robertson OAM is one of the founders of Down Syndrome International and has been involved in advocacy for people with Down syndrome and establishing programs for infants, children and teenagers for over thirty-five years. She was one of the founders of the Asia Pacific Down Syndrome Federation and helped establish support organisations throughout the region. In 1996 Penny established the Australian International Schools in Jakarta and Bali in Indonesia. The schools have operated as inclusive international schools since their inception.

Penny’s daughter with Down Syndrome is 37 years old and fiercely independent. Penny was awarded the Order of Australia medal in 1992 for her contribution to the welfare of people with disabilities. Now officially retired and still takes an interest in promoting inclusive education practices.

Paul Sawka
Awareness Leader for the Canadian Down Syndrome Society

Paul lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and is the Awareness Leader for the Canadian Down Syndrome Society. Paul is a high school and college graduate and continues to attend university part-time in the evenings. His favourite classes are about world events, and he also likes to learn about computers. Paul says that his education helped him to learn the important skills he needed to find a job.
In addition to his studies and work, Paul participates in a wide variety of sports, is an avid sports fan, loves visiting with his family and friends, and enjoys quiet time at his condo, where he lives with a roommate. Paul has presented at many events and to groups large and small about his life, his accomplishments, overcoming challenges, and spreading awareness about Down syndrome.

UNESCO

Our contacts at UNESCO provided this video of an inclusive school for children with disabilities in Armenia for us to share in this session. It has not yet been shown anywhere and contains key messages from their Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report on inclusion and education for the Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Dr Ruth Warick  
First Vice President of the International Disability Alliance, Canada

Dr. Ruth Warick is the President of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing Persons and has been active in IFHOH since 2004. In her home country of Canada, she was a founding member of its national hard of hearing association, the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, of which she is a past president. She represents IFHOH on the International Disability Alliance and serves as IDA’s First Vice-President. Ruth is also active in her community, serving as President of the provincial chapter for persons who are hard of hearing.

Ruth was born hard of hearing and received her first hearing aid at age 11 although her significant hearing loss warranted earlier intervention. She is passionate about accessibility, awareness, education, and inclusion for persons with hearing loss as well as for persons with all types of disabilities. In 2003 she completed her doctoral thesis titled *Voices Unheard: The Academic and Social Experiences of Students who are Hard of Hearing*.

For over 25 years, Ruth was employed at the University of British Columbia where she promoted and facilitated accessibility and accommodations for students, staff, and faculty of all types of disabilities. She lives in Vancouver, Canada.

Thank You

Down Syndrome International would like to thank all those who took part in this event, at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is causing disruption and uncertainty in everyone’s lives. It is testimony to the value and importance of the issues discussed in this event that we have made this happen.

We are extremely grateful to our sponsors, the Permanent Missions of Australia, Brazil, Japan, Mexico, and Poland to the United Nations in New York and also to UNICEF and International Disability Alliance.