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*The Pandemic Forced a World that is More Accessible*

When we think of the pandemic, we think of all the negative things like the deaths and that we couldn't get out and see friends and family and go to events. But many people with disabilities were used to certain social isolation prior to the pandemic. Those with disabilities who can't drive or without public transportation in their area didn't get out much prior to the pandemic.

Something magically happened during the start of the pandemic. Suddenly events and meetings that were previously inaccessible became available over Zoom! People could interact over a video chat format and have accommodations they needed such as using chat and closed captions. I am on both the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities Board and Youth Leadership Forum Board, and we started using Zoom for our meetings during the pandemic, and it makes a big difference rather than using phones. I also started teaching The Arc Academy course called Health Matters with Lisa Pugh from The Arc Wisconsin over Zoom. Zoom makes it possible to teach a class and interact with students in a way that wouldn't be possible over the phone.

A common misconception is that Closed Captions and subtitles only help those who are deaf or hard of hearing. In reality, many accommodations help lots of people with and without disabilities. They help folks with Autism, Auditory Processing Differences, ADHD, and many other disabilities. I use closed captions when watching tv shows, and videos on social media. In Zoom meetings or advocacy events the

hosts can turn on Closed captions to help those who need it, and that has really helped me in meetings and events.

It's easy to think of all the negative ways that the pandemic has affected people, but don't forget there are silver linings that have come out of it. The pandemic has changed things such as virtual meetings, events and the way people interact in general. Creating ways for people with disabilities to feel less socially isolated and more involved is one of the few positive things to come out of the pandemic. I hope to see a continuation of universal design and accessibility in all aspects of life, after the pandemic is done.