

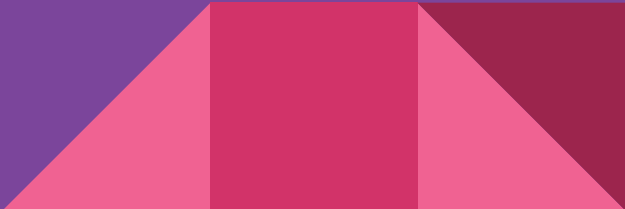


Empowering Young People with Disabilities : Our Experience at EmpowHER Camp

By: Hannah Gallivan & Opal Besaw

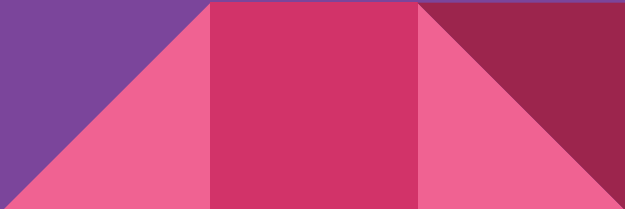
Introductions (Hannah)

Hey everybody! My name is Hannah Gallivan. I'm a senior in high school and a fierce disability rights activist. I have dreams of working in the film industry as a cinematographer or director and helping increase disability representation in film. I adore Taylor Swift, books, queer media, my friends, and telling people about my latest obsession.



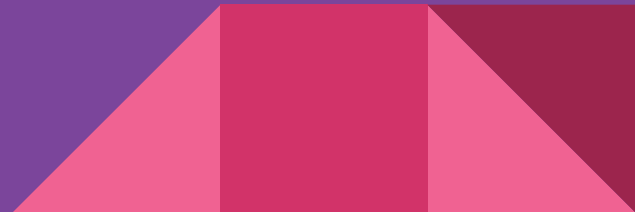
Introductions (Opal)

Hi everybody, my name is Opal Besaw. I am a 20 time published author and avid disability advocate, particularly in the fields of education justice and independent living. My ultimate ambition in life is to be a children's author and minority youth social worker. When I am not fighting for what I believe in, I enjoy reading and writing young adult fiction, spending time with my friends, family and dogs, collecting quotes, and listening to music, especially Taylor Swift.



How We Met

Hannah and I have so much in common, we like to joke that we are one soul sharing two bodies. How did our beautiful friendship start... We met at EmpowHER Camp, a three stage wilderness survival and independent living camp for girls and femme aligned people with disabilities ages 13-18. Stage 1 involves a week of camping in the mountains of upstate New York, connecting with mentors, and developing new skills. Stage 2 is all about working with your mentor to combine those skills into a project that makes a meaningful impact in your community. Stage 3 is a reunion trip to Washington DC to talk to your local senators and representatives about issues of importance to you and network with members of the disability community. We'd like to talk to you a little bit about our projects and the doors that camp has opened for us.



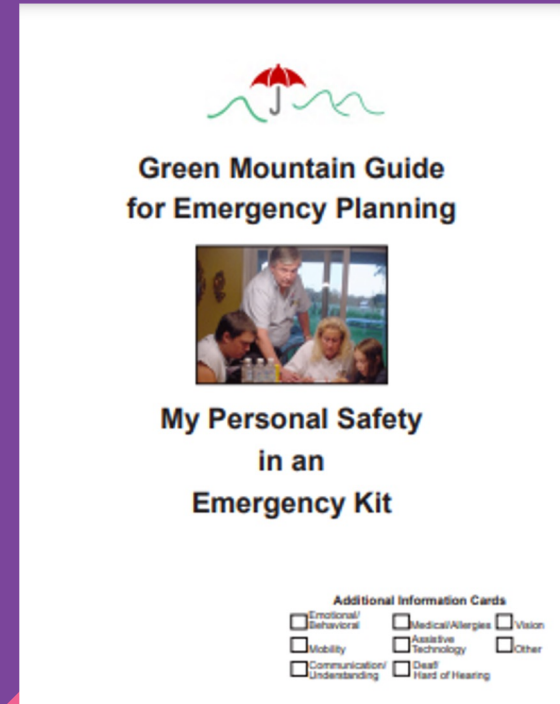
Hannah's Project: Emergency Shelters & Service Dogs

My project for EmpowHer camp was all about emergency shelters and service dogs. I was in the process of getting a service dog, (who I now have!) and wondered how educated shelter workers would be about service dogs and why we needed them in an emergency. I ultimately wanted to increase awareness about service dogs in general.



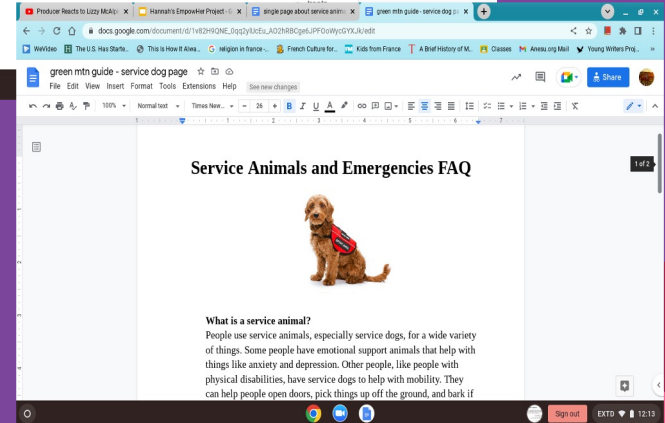
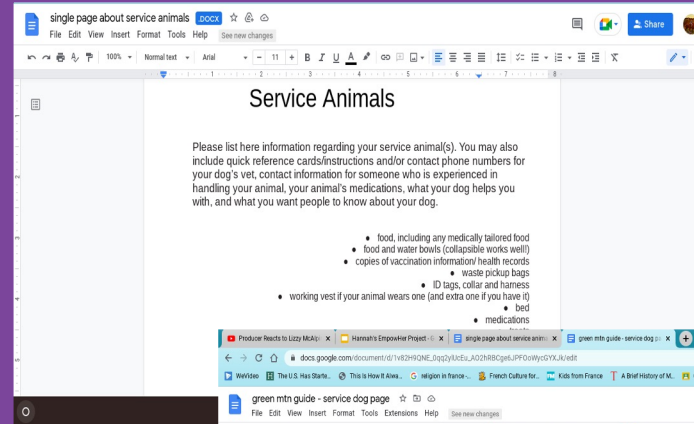
Hannah's Project: Learning about the Green Mountain Guide for Emergency Planning

I also got to talk to a group of people who created an emergency guide for disabled folks. I asked them about their process of making it and what they considered, and then asked if I could add a page about service animals, as well as a FAQ to the existing guide. They were very enthusiastic and helped me a lot in creating the additional page.



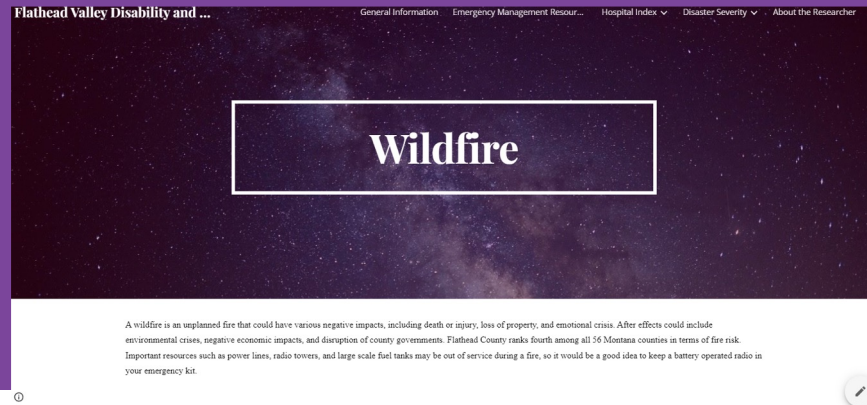
Hannah's Project: Creating Additions to the Green Mountain Guide

I created the additional pages and got them added into the guide, and then did outreach about how the guide had been updated. I contacted my local newspaper and also put a blurb in our monthly DEN (Disability Empower Her Network) newsletter. I was even interviewed in a podcast about it, which was very cool. Throughout this experience I learned a lot about myself, honed my leadership skills, and gained a lot of confidence in myself and my identity as a disabled woman.



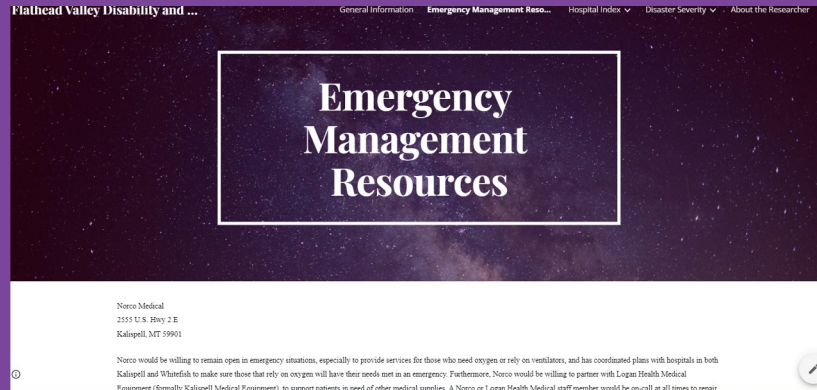
Opal's Project: Emergency Preparedness Resource Guide

For my project I created an emergency preparedness resource guide, specifically designed for people with disabilities which is available in digital, print and Braille. In my guide I covered basic definitions and impacts of the top 9 community emergencies in the Flathead Valley of Montana, where I am from. These included wildfire, flooding, hazardous material spills, severe winter and summer weather, earthquakes, communicable diseases, dam failure, widespread volcanic ash and instances of civil unrest



Opal's Project: Including Inclusive Community Resources

I also included information on various community resources designed to support people in emergency situations. One of these was Norco, a medical supplier who would coordinate with area hospitals to ensure that people had access to oxygen, ventilators, and other medical equipment. Another was NOMAD a company which makes specialized emergency vehicles such as communication units, mobile clinics, and mobile classrooms, to be deployed in extended-duration disasters, such as evacuations and large-scale communicable disease events.

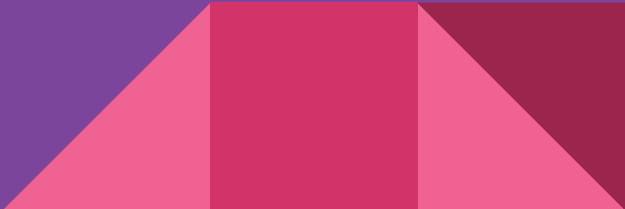


Opal's Project: Most Important Aspects of the Emergency Preparedness Resource Guide

Perhaps the most important thing in my guide was the general information which included an emergency packing list, a directory of local hospitals, and the number to the Sheriff's Department. When the guide was finished I shared it with many local agencies, such as The Office of Public Instruction, my local Center for Independent Living, the city council, and the Montana Youth Leadership Forum. Eventually I even got to talk to Senator Tester about it when I visited him in Washington DC to discuss the caregiver crisis and the issues it presents for Montanans with disabilities. Please let me know if you would like a copy of the guide and I will email it to you in whatever format you need. It felt lovely to be able to make a lasting impact on my community and ensure that future generations of disabled kids feel prepared in emergency situations and I would like to be able to continue my outreach of this project.

Opal's Project: What I Gained

As fulfilling as it was to create a project that extended beyond myself, I think the biggest thing I gained from EmpowHer Camp was confidence. Confidence in myself, confidence in the fact that I am not alone and that it's ok to ask for help, Confidence to try hard things, but most importantly confidence to express myself. I can say without a doubt that I would not be the person I am today if not for my beautiful mentors and fellow campers.



Thank You

We would both collectively like to thank our parents, and everyone at EmpowHer, including our lovely mentors, Katy and Alexis. Opal wishes to thank Senator Jon Tester, Norco Medical, NOMAD Global Communication Systems, and Mayor Mark Johnson and his family. Hannah wishes to thank...





Questions