

Toyota Employees Share Why They're Dedicated to Help Further Amplify the Disability Community's Voices and Visibility

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Disability Pride Month may only be one month out of the year but Toyota's business partnering group (BPG), ToyotAbility, advocates for disability awareness year-round.

ToyotAbility is an employee resource group at the company that embraces employees and families with physical, invisible, temporary, and permanent disabilities including those with neurodiversity.

The employee group takes pride in being a space to help promote awareness and education about the disability community, help create shared experiences that foster empathy, and help amplify the voices and visibility of those impacted by disabilities.

ToyotAbility's chapter based at Toyota Motor North America in Plano, Texas held its first-ever Disability Pride Month back in July which was met with positive reception and engagement. Proceeds from a silent auction went directly to [My Possibilities](#), a North Texas-based continuing education and job placement program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

The group also participated in the nonprofit's signature volunteer event to help students in the classroom. Additionally, ToyotAbility partnered with Parents at Toyota and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) for a virtual session to help prepare and support those in caregiving roles.

Initiatives and events like these are what makes ToyotAbility special for its members. It aims to be a resource that supports Toyota's commitment to advancing inclusivity and mobility for all.

See why some of these ToyotAbility members are proud to support this organization.



Driving Connections

Shortly after joining Toyota in late 2019, Gus Perez, a senior instructional designer for Toyota Financial Services (TFS), knew that he wanted to be a part of something that would make him feel closer to his colleagues. Like many, Perez was faced with isolation and disconnection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The work-from-home situation made me think about how I wanted to continue to build my connections with the people at Toyota,” he says. “So, I joined ToyotAbility because the mission and goal of the business partnering

group were close to my heart.”

For Perez, who is personally affected by spinal muscular atrophy, a genetic neuromuscular disease that weakens his strength and mobility, the BPG has given him a sense of community and provided him with leadership responsibilities.

“It wasn’t too long after I joined ToyotAbility as a member that there was an opportunity to become involved with supporting education and development as a board member,” he says. “I work as a senior instructional designer, so this opportunity was the perfect fit to lend my expertise to the group. They welcomed me with open arms, and I’ve been active on the ToyotAbility board ever since.”

Perez has become a go-to spokesperson for ToyotAbility, where he’s developed training programs for Disability Employment Awareness Month, as well as moderated and led conversations with groups both inside and outside the company.

“The recognition of how effective I’ve been as a ToyotAbility ambassador has given me a great sense of pride, because I feel I’ve helped move the BPG and Toyota forward by communicating our shared mission and values,” he says.



Speaking Up and Sparking Change

Effective communication and being your own advocate are key to bringing about change. Gabriel Marciano, a product engineer with Quality Compliance, Product Quality & Services Support at Toyota, knows this firsthand.

“I sought out ToyotAbility while struggling with my own mobility challenges at Toyota West Virginia,” he says. “Mitochondrial disease has affected my ability to walk and stand for extended periods, so while working at Toyota West Virginia, I requested an accommodation: the ability to use a golf cart to move from building to

building. But as my symptoms progressed, I soon needed to use a scooter, and I was eventually allowed to use a power chair on the plant floors.”

Using his voice not only made his life easier at work, but it also empowered him to help other employees in similar situations.

“The work that I’m doing to promote awareness for folks with physical disabilities and invisible diseases,” he says, is what makes him happy. “My disease is invisible and incredibly rare, but I’m lucky. I’m blessed to be who I am and where I am.”

The chair of ToyotAbility’s Training and Education program plans to continue using his voice to spark new ideas.

“The Toyota Way teaches us to bring problems to the surface,” Marciano says. “The hardest part of needing a personal mobility device is transporting it. I believe providing mobility for all includes providing a mobility solution for folks with physical disabilities/limitations. This is a problem that most able-bodied people might not consider because they haven’t had to face that type of problem themselves.”



Passion for Service

Wendy Teufel, an Engineer with Material Quality Chemical at Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America, enjoys discovering fun ways to engage and educate in her role as the chair for ToyotAbility's Community Engagement.

She is inspired by her daughter, Emma, who has special needs (neurodivergent) with an intellectual developmental disability (IDD). Teufel says she believed the business partnering group would be an excellent fit.

“I’m thankful for a friend who encouraged me to get involved with ToyotAbility,” she says. “I was already an active leader in the disability community outside of Toyota. The mission of ToyotAbility aligns with my passion for advocating and improving the lives of those with disabilities.”

Since joining the ToyotAbility board, Teufel has been busy raising awareness and creating experiences that will educate and drive inclusivity.

For example, last fall, Teufel organized a baseball event with the Miracle League of Frisco. ToyotAbility partnered with the Parents of Toyota BPG and had an amazing turnout of over 20 employees on a Saturday morning. Volunteers served as a “buddy” to kids with special needs. It was heartwarming to see every kid get the opportunity at bat and run the bases.

“I’ve worked hard to identify and organize community events for our membership that promote exposure, inclusion and impact, because that’s where the most learning and growth happens,” she says. “I’m grateful for the opportunity to serve in ToyotAbility with the most welcoming and supportive team.”