

Little Differences” Debuts

“Little Differences: The Portrayal of Children with disABILITIES Throughout History” is an exhibit that examines the depiction of children with disabling conditions in a variety of formats across the ages. Whether appearing in works of fine art, literature, media campaigns or in popular culture, these children were intended to rouse the audience to action. “Little Differences” is an opportunity to assess modern perceptions of disability through the prism of historical imagery.

“Little Differences” includes a six panel banner stand exhibit with “pre-poster children” from prior to 1900, kids and the Parents Movement, politicians and kids, kids on TV and in print media, a new generation of “post-poster children” and push-back from the disability rights community. A selection of artifacts from the Museum collection complements the banner stands. On display are tiny adaptive shoes, small AFO’s as well as postcards, match covers, and photographs. A trio of My American Girl® dolls is also part of the exhibit; one doll uses a wheelchair for mobility, one walks a service dog in training, and the third has a hearing aid and has lost her hair due to a medical condition.

The Museum has also expanded to a second gallery to display classic fundraising posters and photographs that reinforce the theme of “Little Differences.” Where ever

possible the posters and photos bear the names of the poster children and the organizations they represented. The extra room allowed the display of “Dolly Downs,” a doll with “a loveable difference,” and Kathy (a Hal’s Pals doll), who has light brown hair, a pink dress, pink shoes, straw hat, necklace, clasp purse, gray leg braces and gray crutches.



One attendee to the exhibit opening remarked, “My wife and I truly enjoyed the history and displays regarding children with developmental and physical disabilities as related to business in years past to present. I thought the explanation of how business adapted to the changing culture was interesting in light of their marketing strategies and awareness to various disabilities,.... The gradual visibility of children with disabilities in the camera ready world was interesting. The whole program was interesting, thought provoking and subject to discussion. As always, a great job bringing awareness to the community.”

The Little Differences exhibit will be displayed until the end of August at the Museum of disABILITY History and then available to rent. The exhibit is supported by the New York Council for the Humanities and Erie County. For more information or to arrange a guided tour for a group or organization, call 716.629.3626.



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