

Meet Karen



My name is Karen Lynn-Chlup. At eighteen months of age, I was diagnosed with left-side hemiplegia, a form of cerebral palsy.

Yet I've lived a successful, rich and fulfilling life.

After graduating high school as my class valedictorian, I was denied entry into college. Why? Because I was labelled as “borderline mentally retarded”. Despite the unrelenting discrimination that I faced, I refused to give up on my dream of attending college and creating an independent and meaningful life for myself.

And so I became the first person with a disability in history to take on the state of California and demand their own civil rights.

I won my case against the California State Department of Rehabilitation in 1979, and in 1980, I began my college education, and in 1985, I graduated with honors. Since then, I've dedicated my life to helping those with disabilities break through barriers and build self-belief so that they can achieve their life goals.

My Mission

Growing up with cerebral palsy, it was my fantastic support network that allowed me to overcome the most significant limitations of my condition and create the life that I've lived. My parents, teachers, and mentors gave me the skills, encouragement and confidence to overcome many of the physical and mental challenges of my disability (by the age of eleven, I was able to hang up my leg brace for good!).

Having the right kind of support is everything to a person living with a disability, just as it was everything to me, which is why I've made supporting individuals with disabilities along with their families and caregivers my life's work!

I'm committed to teaching others how to shift perceptions, mindsets and attitudes around disabilities, as without this ongoing improvement we cannot make positive change for ourselves or those we care for.

I have a lifetime of experience overcoming not only the physical and mental challenges that come with having a disability, but also the discrimination and social stigma that are unfortunately still quite prominent in our society.

That is what I educate on – how any individual with a disability and their supporting family and caregivers can work to overcome these challenges, cultivate self independence, and empower themselves and others to live a truly fulfilling life!

Creating Positive Experiences

Here are a few kind words and testimonials from people and organizations I have worked with.

“I have had the pleasure of knowing Ms. Lynn for approximately six years. She has a strong commitment to improving the lives of persons with disabilities; she has touched the lives of many.

Ms. Lynn is consistently positive yet compassionate and always advocates for the needs of people with disabilities. She has excellent communication skills, remarkable leadership qualities, and a deep conviction to the philosophy relating to inclusion, life quality, and supported living for people with developmental disabilities.”

Susan J. Laird, M.S., Supported Living Specialist

“Her life experiences, which include living a very independent life while dealing with the challenges of cerebral palsy and a learning disability, have allowed her to easily identify and constructively empathize with those who are themselves disabled.

As an inspirational speaker and member of the Harbor Regional Centre Advisory Committee, Karen is an assertive and articulate voice for client rights and other issues that affect quality of life for people with developmental disabilities.”

Paula Fiebert, Director of Adolescent and Adult Services, Harbor Regional Centre

“She [Ms. Chlup] treated the clients with great dignity and respect. Ms. Chlup has been involved in a variety of volunteer and work opportunities with the developmentally disabled, including serving on the Harbor Regional Centre Client Services Board Committee for several years. Ms. Chlup is very dedicated to this population.”

Colleen Mock, Director of Community Services, Harbor Regional Centre

“In order to run an effective, high-quality program, you must first start with a superior instructor or teacher. Karen Lynn-Chlup is considered by myself and her peers to be in this group. She is a reliable and prompt person who can't help but to spread her cheerful attitude to everyone that she comes in contact with.”

David A. Lewis, Associate Director of Health and P.E, Beverly Hills Family Y

“Karen puts her all into teaching. She takes great pride in what she does, and she always has something motivating to keep us striving to do better. She is a very competent person who is most reliable and trustworthy in all ways. She is a cheerful person who brings a smile into the room each and every time she arrives. She can't help but bring joy and happiness into other's lives. I recommend Karen highly.”

Maxine Gallagher, WALTERIA Senior Centre

Learn More About Karen

Karen Lynn-Chlup is an author, speaker, disability support specialist, and special needs advocate.

Hi, I'm Karen, and as a disability support coach and special needs advocate, I'm here to say, "We can."

I know first-hand the struggles of living with disability. When I was 5 months old, I had an adverse reaction to my second DPT shot. By morning, I was in a coma. My family was told that I had a 30% chance to live and that I was going to be deaf, dumb and blind. Although, I fooled them all! Miraculously, I made an almost complete recovery. Then, at 18 months old, and many therapy sessions later, I was diagnosed by Children's Hospital of Los Angeles with left-side hemiplegia Cerebral Palsy. With that diagnosis came numerous physical challenges and a learning disability, and with numerous physical challenges and a learning disability came people saying: "You can't."

But I refused to settle.

"You tell me I can't, and I'll show you I can."

With an encouraging and supportive network of people around me throughout my life – people who truly believed in me – I was able to overcome enormous obstacles and achieve more than I ever thought possible. At an early age, I passed that encouragement on. From the age of six, I can remember helping classmates with Cerebral Palsy, Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, and birth defects that had worse impairments than my own, and advocating for them.

Being shown the importance of hard work, of independence, and of relentlessly chasing my goals, no matter how hard or distant they may seem, paid off. By the age of eleven, my doctors told me that I could hang up my leg brace – forever!

This attitude of persistence that was instilled in me from an early age has shaped my entire life, helping me to break through barriers that were previously deemed unbreakable.

I was told I couldn't attend college because I was mentally retarded. So what did I do? I took the state of California to court. In fact, I was the first person with a disability to take on the state of California and fight for their civil rights in the court of law. And in 1979, I won the case, allowing me to begin my college education. I graduated in 1985 with honors. Since then, I've dedicated my life to supporting, coaching, and mentoring those with disabilities, helping them to maximize their opportunities, cultivate their independence, and create for themselves truly rich and fulfilling lives. I've also committed myself to supporting and educating family members and caregivers of people with disabilities on how to improve perceptions, inclusiveness and care through speaking and advocacy.

I have never given up on being a voice for dreaming and achieving in the face of adversity—and I never will. The greatest gift I can receive from clients and audiences alike is when I hear, **"If Karen can do it, I can too!"**

Karen's Keynote Topics

Crushing Perceptions to Foster Greatness

Every human being on this planet deserves dignity and respect. Perception is an incredibly powerful thing. Here, I talk not only about external perceptions of individuals with disabilities; I also explore the monumental importance of self-perception.

Overcoming negative perceptions is a huge and difficult part of disability support, which is why it's so crucial that every person involved in supporting people with disabilities is aware of these themes.

Ideal Audiences: Educators (middle school to college); community and support organization teams/staff; special needs assistants/specialists; family members who support individuals with disabilities.

Your Audience Experience: Audiences will be presented with a first-hand perspective on what it's like to overcome negative perceptions about disabilities and succeed in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges (in both a legal and a social context). They will leave empowered with knowledge and techniques for advocating and fostering a more inclusive environment.

Drive Your Life Beyond the Hills of Fear and Doubt

In the first topic, I discuss external perceptions, focusing on discrimination, social stigma, and the way in which people with disabilities are generally viewed as a whole.

Self-perception, however, is of even more significant importance. It was my resolute and unwavering self-belief that gave me the strength to fight relentlessly for what I knew was right, and overcome mountains of both legal and social discrimination to achieve my goals.

Ideal Audiences: People with disabilities and special needs; family members, supporters, and teachers can also gain motivation and insight for people they care for.

Your Audience Experience: Empowerment is at the heart of this keynote. Audiences will walk away from motivated to never take no for an answer, even when the odds are seemingly stacked against them. By relating to my own experiences, challenges, and triumphs – both personal and professional – they will have new belief that they can achieve great things in their life. They'll also take away actionable techniques to help give them that extra boost quickly.

**Contact Karen Lynn-Chlup about her
speaking services at karenlynn@whispersofhope.org**