Christine Burke and Dawn Graeme



Christine Burke - For as long as she's been able to talk, Christine has never been afraid to speak her mind. At the age of three, she got up in front of the March of Dimes saying, "My name is Christine and I use a wheelchair, and now I'm going to eat my mac n' cheese," proudly solidifying her role as a disabled advocate. By the time she was six, her parents were seeking an outlet for all of her creative spunk and energy, thus her foray into performing began. The pinnacle of Christine's childhood came at the age of 10 when her mom took her to her first day playing youth wheelchair basketball at the Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program (BORP) in Berkeley, CA. Here, Christine not only learned the skills needed to run a successful pick and roll, but the chance to interact, learn and develop with people who were just like her. With the help of her peers, she learned how to navigate airports with her basketball chair and luggage, pop down curbs when no curb cutout was available, see the country and realize that she could live an independent and full life. While she had to put her acting passion on hold, Christine still participated in high school choir, placed and participated in district wide speech contests three years in a row, and educated myriad

audiences on disability awareness.
In 2007 Christine began a 2.5-year stint at the University of Arizona, after receiving a scholarship to play in the nationally ranked U.S. Women's Wheelchair Basketball team. Her second year at the U of A opened new doors that led her to join the wheelchair tennis team and become a writing skills coach for incoming minority students. The group of new students she was fortunate to mentor included first generation college students, international students and students with disabilities. In 2010, Christine made the daunting, but fruitful, life-changing decision to transfer to the University of the Pacific in Stockton, CA. While U of A is known for their competitive adaptive athletics program, it wasn't until she got to UOP that she was able to reconnect with her passion for the disability community. As a communications major, she had the unique opportunity to delve into studying the impact of the media on the disability community and present her findings at a research conference of her peers and outside professionals. Christine graduated Cum Laude in 2012 and had the privilege of being her graduating class's University Flag Bearer. Her life became the true definition of "this is real life" when, after nearly a decade in the corporate world, Christine landed a role as a talent manager representing high profile Deaf and Disabled talent at C Talent Management in Los Angeles. When she isn't working her dream job, you will find Christine on or near a stage, visiting her Cast Member brother at The Happiest Place on Earth, reading the newest romance on her Kindle, and attending various musical theater and/or geek conventions from California to New York. Christine is beyond humbled to use her Ms. Wheelchair America 2022 platform to help put disability back in diversity.

Dawn Graeme - Born and raised in San Jose, Dawn has been a California girl her entire life. At age 12, Dawn decided she wanted to be a physical therapist. It was career day at John Muir Junior High School and physical therapy spoke to her. She was determined from that moment on to do whatever it took to become a PT. This included taking a lot of science classes and getting experience volunteering in various settings. Dawn graduated from San Jose State with a Bachelor's in Health Science in 1979. Then in 1981, she went to her first-choice school, University of California, San Francisco for her certificate in Physical Therapy. Ever a believer in life-long learning, in 2009, Dawn went back to school for her Doctorate in Pediatric Physical Therapy at Drexel University. Over the past 40 years, she has worked in nearly every setting in which PT is needed. Dawn has extensive experience in orthopedics and rehabilitation, but her dream job came in
2000 when she started work in early intervention for a local school district. Working with families and their new babies was a gift beyond words.

It wasn't long before Dawn's work at the school district led to working with older students and becoming more involved with the equipment required to allow them to access the educational environment. Hard to believe, but a second dream job came on top of the first one. Working with students with mobility needs, and often in conjunction, communication needs allowed her to meet some of her favorite people with incredible skills. Students were the teachers when it came to using the latest technology to speak, write, and create. Of course, the AAC and AT professionals were invaluable resources as well. In December 2021, it was time to hang up the school district hat, and she retired from working in public education, with a lifetime of memories and friends.

In 2013, Dawn began teaching anatomy and physiology to nursing students, fulfilling a lifelong passion for sharing with the next generation. She is currently Assistant Professor at Unitek College and is working with a team on a developing Physical Therapy Assistant Program. Now that she is only working one full time job, Dawn has more time for walking her two dogs, hiking with friends, riding her bike, and (someday) organizing 36 years of living in the same house, collecting far too much stuff! Dawn is honored to be the "Queen Mother" to Ms. Wheelchair America, who has led her on a journey far beyond anything she ever imagined.

Keynote Description

Monday, April 24, 2023 8:15 am - 9:45 am

The Humanity of Disability

Physical therapist and mother, daughter and patient, advocate and liaison. Most people would imagine this dynamic was composed of three or four separate individuals; but what if there were only two? What if you found yourself both as a PT and a mother of a disabled child? For over 30 years, mother and daughter team, Dawn and Christine, have been navigating this reality together and learning the delicate dance needed to maintain their identities while traversing an unknown future. Through their session, Dawn and Christine hope that by conveying their own unique experiences with disability, that they can help professionals effectively understand and connect to the humanity of their students or patients and their families.