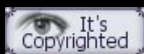


# UII - Understanding Invisible Illnesses

"UII" Can Spread Hope! Since this is all about spreading awareness and sharing information, please feel free to share this blog, post a link, or repost something (as long as you include a link back to here for your readers). Thanks!



Please link back here or request permission!

2011 SSF Walkabout

Thursday, April 28, 2011

Disability Matters 2011 Conference

at 11:27 PM

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## About Me



### Jenny Pettit

I'm a 'modern woman' trying to balance a new (and strenuous) career, a young marriage, family with serious health challenges, and my own chronic illnesses while keeping my faith and sanity. My current diagnoses include: Sjogren's Syndrome, Raynaud's, osteoarthritis, dysautonomia (or autonomic dysfunction), localized Scleroderma, and fibromyalgia. Other diagnoses are always looming. I'm trying to develop UII ("We") - Understanding Invisible Illnesses as an awareness and support network for those who suffer from conditions others can't see (and those who suffer with them - friends and family). I'm also trying to focus on hope and victories, while still giving into the healthy aspects of sharing challenges with people who understand them. Join in anytime!

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Photo courtesy of and used with permission from Erin, my peer from one of our Ohio offices.

*These are the KPMG employees from literally across the country, gathered at the Conference to receive our Employer of Choice Award!*

On April 6-7, 2011, 16 organizations in a variety of industries from around the country were honored at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Disability Matters Conference in San Jose, CA. The awards conference, run by [Springboard Consulting](#), recognizes companies that help people with disabilities succeed through their efforts as employers and suppliers. Honorees are recognized in one of five categories: Workforce, Workplace, Marketplace, Small Business, and new this year, Employer of Choice.

KPMG has been recognized in the past in one of the four original categories; this year, the firm was told that our efforts go far beyond what the original categories encompass, and we would be recognized with Cisco Systems, Inc. as the first Employer of Choice honorees!

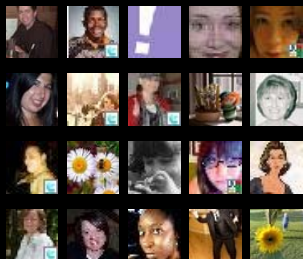
The conference consisted of many networking opportunities & panel presentations by the honorees in each category, creating a rare opportunity as each organization shared what they are doing as well as what roadblocks they have overcome along the way. Attendees were able to ask questions of each panel, effectively producing an array of 'take-aways' we can use in our own corporate

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 Photo courtesy of and used with permission from Erin, my peer from one of our Ohio offices. These are the KPMG employees from literally acr...



**Guest Post: You've Helped Me**  
 Our next guest post comes from another Jen! "Daisybee", as her friends call her, blogs at Suicidal No More about living with mental and ch...

community. I would have presumed it would be a feel-good day, celebrating all we're doing, but how much could one of us gain? Afterall, we were all honorees already...and KPMG was an Employer of Choice, of course. What could be new when this was a group of singing clergyman preaching to the choir?

Employment policies, top-down integration efforts, and radical accessible venues outside of the workplace, that's what's new!! Paint me with stripes and call me a tigerlily, I couldn't have been more visionless. It's hard to narrow it down because all 16 organizations impressed me, but here are some of my absolute favorites - watch out for these radical revolutionaries, people:

- **Cisco Systems**, host to this year's event and the other Employer of Choice, took us on tours the afternoon we arrived. Visiting just a few stops of their 30+ building campus in San Jose, we encountered a receptionist in another building (via one large interactive TV + webcam set-up) before heading off to learn more about just a few of the adaptive technology products they offer. "So you saw a videophone, big deal"...true, if that's all we saw. But actually, we learned how they dream up the new technology, how they incorporate real-life potential users to test their products, and how they are designed to fit into a lifestyle, not define it.
- Autism is a hot topic these days, and as you all know by now my brother has Asperger's, so it's a topic that catches my attention. Growing up watching my dad and brother fight every time they went to the movies as he tried to deal with the overall darkness, bright flashing screen, blow-your-hair-back volume, and social standards about laughing, clapping, or singing along...well, it was exhausting! **AMC Theaters** paid attention to a mom whose son had the same challenges - and instituted Sensory Friendly Films! At these special airings (the same weekends as shows are available to neurotypicals, but at times when there are fewer crowds), kids - Autistic, neurotypical, or whatever - are encouraged to stand, dance, sing, shout, and participate in their movies...which, by the way, are shown at more tollerable volumes, with a little bit more lighting, and no trailers to side track attention!
- Every kid has their favorite piece of equipment or game to play at a park. I was a see-saw fan myself, though in their absence my heart belongs to swings, whereas there were the hardcore jungle-gymnasts or the Emperors of Tag. But one family dreamed up a magical playworld I couldn't have fathomed, and which warms my heart. **Morgan's Wonderland** in Austin, TX is touted as the World's First Ultra Accessible Family Fun Park in acknowledgement of their simple but ingenious solutions to common problems. A borderless sandcircle replaces the barriered sandbox, admission is limited to a fraction of the potential capacity to minimize ride wait times, & world-premier 'off road' vehicles that allow people who use any mobility aide to join their family on a park-wide trail effectively *remove* the things that keep people of different abilities apart. Only one entrance & exit are utilized to control volume and security. But my ABSOLUTE favorite innovation? One that is so simple and would be so useful to every park go-er in the US...each family/group entering the park receives wristbands such as we know from water parks, but these have RFID tags! Tags are assigned to a family/group and are usable at stations throughout the park to locate other members of the group. This allows every visitor freedom to safely roam, and helps find members who may have wandered away from the crowd!

KPMG's Disability Network sent representatives from offices around the country to take part in the conference, including yours truly. Each participant was asked to bring back action items to implement in their local office. Besides the amazing inspirations listed above, some of my favorite ideas for my office include ways to effectively distribute information to employees, accessibility considerations as we remodel in the coming years, and potential local office trainings. Now I just have to find time to work with office leadership and our chapter of the Disability Network to put key take-aways into practice.

Disability concerns are relevant to all employees in my firm, whether they consider themselves disabled or not. If they don't have a challenge, I promise one of their coworkers does. Accommodations developed for one employee's challenge often wind up being useful to other employees. And, as it was said at the conference, 'this is a group anyone can find themselves a member of at any time'. It would only further our goal to be a true Employer of Choice for all employees to unite in support of these initiatives...and the same is true for employers, community



### Guest Post: Search for Validation

As I've mentioned (probably too much), we are in audit busy season, which means time is tighter than my favorite jeans after 3 months of Pre...

### Who Cares About Sjogren's Syndrome?

I try to be original in my posts. Who wants to read the same-old same-old, or worse, a copy cat? But, sometimes my fellow bloggers are jus...



### Can I Be a Survivor?

Image found here . As you know, I have a team for the Philadelphia area Sjogren's Walkabout on May 7 (shameless promo: feel free to join or...

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    - Who Says Seuss Has to be a Doctor?
    - What We Can Learn From Sammy Davis Jr.
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    - Join me for WEGO Health's Webinar: Navigating Your...
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groups, and even families around the world.

The 2012 Disability Matters Awards & Conference will be in my backyard next year, in Newark, NJ April 18-19. Not an American reader? How about Paris, France, for the Inaugural European Disability Matters Conference! No date has been determined yet, but details will be coming soon, I'm sure. No matter where you are, I suggest following Springboard's leader, Nadine Vogel, on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#)!



Reactions:  funny (0)  interesting (0)  "I agree" (1)  "let's discuss" (0)

Labels: [awareness](#), [chronic illness](#), [exercise](#), [invisible illness](#), [job](#), [relationships](#), [workplace](#)

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\* Transparency Note \*

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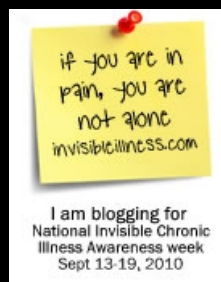
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