

## Her Abilities Award

# Jury 2019

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### Yuriko Oda

Accessibility Advocate  
(Japan)



Yuriko Oda is 39 years old and is from Tokyo, Japan. She is the President of a non-profit organization called PADM (Patient Association for Distal Myopathies) and the CEO of WheelLog! (a user-generated accessibility map application).

Yuriko is a wheelchair user and often explores unknown places in order to check wheelchair accessibility. She posts information on her activities on her Youtube channel "Wheelchair Walker"

*"People with disabilities all over the world are faced with many different issues. I believe that they can offer a unique perspective on problem-solving and help work on social issues. I am especially interested in the problems of women with disabilities and I believe this project can not only empower them but also bring them education, information, elegance and equal rights."*

### Sara Minkara

Founder and CEO, Empowerment Through Integration (ETI)  
(United States/Lebanon)



Sara Minkara is the founder and CEO of Empowerment Through Integration (ETI), a nonprofit fostering a more inclusive society through groundbreaking initiatives that empower youth with disabilities, challenge stereotypes, and promote respect for individual value. A Lebanese-American Muslim woman who lost her sight at seven, Sara transformed her unwavering passion for this work into innovative programs with a global reach. A graduate of Wellesley College and

the Harvard Kennedy School, she has been recognized by Forbes’ “30 Under 30,” the Clinton Global Initiative, and more.

*“I’m so excited to honour the achievements of women with disabilities! I truly believe everyone has something beautiful and unique to offer in the world, and every identity should be valued and celebrated. Women with disabilities so often are marginalized, but the Her Abilities Award is making sure each and every voice is heard and empowered to bring greatness and light into the world.”*

## **Laura Gehlhaar**

Writer, blogger, activist, social worker  
(Germany)



Laura Gehlhaar was born in Düsseldorf, Germany in 1983. Her studies in social work and psychology brought her to the Netherlands, before moving to Berlin in 2008. After her studies she followed her heart and landed a job at a psychiatric ward. Since completing training for mediation and coaching in 2014, she works both as coach and author. Besides writing about life both in the city and in the wheelchair, she speaks publicly about inclusion and accessibility. Her first book „Kann man da noch was machen?“ was published by Heyne in September 2016.

*“I didn’t have female role models with disabilities when I was young – so I am delighted now to see that there are strong, smart and self-confident women with disabilities who have paved the way for others. I am honoured to recognize the work of these women with the Her Abilities Award.”*

## Heidemarie Egger

PR and Communications at Austrian Disability Council  
(Austria)



2018 Heidemarie Egger started to work as PR- and communications manager at “Österreichischer Behindertenrat/Austrian Disability Council”. Before she worked as program manager of the DisAbility Talent Program, where she enabled students with disabilities to pursue their career. A graduate in communications, she gained her first work experience as PR-manager at “Career Moves”, an inclusive online job-platform for people with disabilities. Heidemarie Egger was chairwomen of the patient organisation “Marfan Initiative Österreich” for five years and is still active in the board. The “Marfan Initiative Österreich” has the goal to raise awareness and empower people in Austria who are affected by the rare disease marfan syndrome.

*“The Her Abilities Awards are the first international recognition of the achievements and capabilities of women with disabilities. Thanks to this visibility these women become role models and forerunners. It is a great pleasure and honour for me to support the Her Abilities Award.”*

## Susannah Rodgers

Paralympic Swimmer, Communications Team - Public Affairs Officer  
(United Kingdom)



Susie Rodgers is a Paralympic champion swimmer who has won a total of 30 international medals throughout her career. (Gold in the 50m Butterfly at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, two bronze medals in Rio and is a triple bronze medallist from the London 2012 Paralympics) Susie with a First-Class honour's degree in Modern Languages from Newcastle University and has worked for nine years as a project manager across different global education programmes at the British Council. She is a Non-Executive Director on several boards, currently for the London 2012 Olympics legacy charity Spirit of 2012 and Raleigh International, as well as previously serving on the board of the British Athletes Commission (the UK's elite athlete welfare organisation), where she was the Chair of the Athlete Advisory Group. She also manages her own business - speaking, consulting and advising on

various global panels including at the British Council, E&Y, for the British Government and others. She works externally on diversity and inclusion initiatives, speaking on panels in the UK and abroad and is passionate about empowerment for all, especially for women and people with disabilities. Susie was awarded an MBE in 2017 by her Majesty for services to swimming in the Queen's New Years' Honours list and is a Young Global Leader with the World Economic Forum.

*"Her Abilities is a fantastic way to highlight the incredible work of women with disabilities all over the world, to give them a platform to share their achievements and for those to be recognised in a celebratory way. I feel honoured to be part of the judging panel for these unique awards and to celebrate with these inspirational women together."*

## **Chantal Cavin**

Triathlete and World Para Swimming Champion  
(Switzerland)



Chantal has been blind since she was 14 years old. She was 17 years active in para swimming and participated in the Paralympics Athens, Beijing and London. She was world champion several times and held the world record in crawl style of 50, 100, 800 and 1,500 metres. Now, she is an athlete and her best time was 3:14:11

*"Don't judge someone too hastily. They may just need a head start!"*

## Greta Spatz

Special Education Teacher, Moderator, Project lead of "Und du so?" (Austria)



Greta Scheichenost (Spatz) was born in 1989 and currently lives out her passion as a special education teacher in Vienna, Austria. Apart from working as a teacher, she also leads the disability awareness project called "Und du so?" (And you?), she has published various articles, has taken part in podcasts in German-speaking countries all within the topic of inclusion and diversity. In addition, she has taken part in and has moderated panel discussions on the topic of disability law. Above all else, Greta is inspired by her students and hopes that through her actions she can contribute to a society that gives diversity and inclusive living a chance.

*"Women with disabilities - the accomplishments in their individual categories and their valuable commitment towards an inclusive society are able to receive the visibility and recognition they deserve through the Her Abilities Award. I hope this will inspire many more women to do the same. Being a member of the jury is a great honor and an even greater joy for me!"*

## Farida Bedwei

Software Engineer/Disabilities Rights Advocate/Author (Ghana)



Farida Bedwei is a software engineer who co-founded a fintech company - Logiciel, which promotes financial inclusion by building micro-banking systems for financial institutions.

She has won many awards across Africa for her work in the technology industry as well as her activism in promoting disability awareness. She has been featured on CNN African Voices, BBC, MSNBC Africa, DW Radio, and many other local and international media platform.

She is also a self-published author, having written her first book, "Definition of a Miracle", a few years ago.



In October 2018, Farida teamed up with Leti Arts to author the first comic book featuring a superheroine with Cerebral Palsy - Karmzah.

*“Growing up with a disability, it would have been great to see successful women with similar conditions in the limelight, so we’d have role models to look up to. The Her Abilities award showcases the achievements of women from all walks of life, who have managed to succeed in their chosen fields despite having a reason not to, and I am honored to be on the jury panel.”*

## **Ninia LaGrande**

Writer, host, poetry slammer  
(Germany)



Ninia LaGrande (aka Ninia Binias) was born in 1983. She lives and works in Hannover, Germany.

Ninia produces the weekly podcast 'Die Kolumnisten' for audible.de. She regularly contributes commentaries and texts for newspapers, magazines, and online portals such as Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland, Missy Magazin, leidmedien.de, and taz.

She is CEO of Hannover-based award-winning agency Buero fuer Popkultur GmbH & Co. KG where she designs sustainable cultural concepts and strategies. She has won a number of awards for her work on feminism and inclusion.

Ninia represents people with disabilities on the advisory council for Hannover's application for European Cultural Capital 2025.

*“Women with disabilities around the world make important, committed and valuable contributions. To me, it is a matter of course to support them! By joining the 'Her Abilities' jury, I am delighted to partake in bringing the achievements of women with disabilities into the well-deserved public spotlight.”*

## **Mariam Doumbia**

Musician  
(Mali)



Mariam Doumbia is part of the musical duo Amadou & Mariam. She became blind at age 5 as a consequence of untreated measles.

Known as "the blind couple from Mali", Amadou & Mariam met at Mali's Institute for the Young Blind, where they both performed at the Institute's Eclipse Orchestra, directed by Idrissa Soumaouro, and found they shared an interest in music.

*"I'm honored and proud to be part of the Her Abilities Award jury. It's a great opportunity to meet other great women who have achieved extraordinary things and who can certainly represent and inspire others women around the globe."*

## **Judith Heumann**

Disability Rights Activist  
(United States)



Judith (Judy) Heumann is a lifelong advocate for the rights of disabled people. Judy previously served as President Obama's first Special Advisor for International Disability Rights at the U.S. Department of State, where she served from 2010-2017. From 1993 to 2001, Judy served in the Clinton Administration as the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the Department of Education. She has played a role in the development and implementation of major legislation including the IDEA, Section 504, the Americans with Disability Act and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Her goal in life is to continue to advance the rights and empowerment of ALL disabled people around the world.

*"I am proud to serve on the Jury for the Her Abilities Award. Disabled women around the world for too long have not been heralded for the*

*accomplishments they are making in their local, national or international communities. As we work to advance the rights of disabled people and emphasize the multiple areas of discrimination that disabled women face, these awardees will be able to add their voices as disabled women fighting for equality.”*

## **Haben Girma**

Disability Rights Lawyer, author, speaker  
(United States)



The first Deafblind person to graduate from Harvard Law School, Haben Girma advocates for equal opportunities for people with disabilities. President Obama named her a White House Champion of Change. She received the Helen Keller Achievement Award, and a spot on Forbes 30 Under 30. Haben travels the world consulting and public speaking, teaching clients the benefits of fully accessible products and services. She’s a talented storyteller who helps people frame difference as an asset. She resisted society’s low expectations, choosing to create her own pioneering story. Haben is working on a book that will be published by Hachette in 2019.

*“We need to celebrate the talents of women with disabilities. We hope to increase opportunities for women with disabilities by highlighting some of our stories.”*



## **Ekaete Judith Umoh**

Social inclusion & disability expert  
(Nigeria)



Ekaete Judith Umoh is an international disability rights activist committed to inclusive development for people with disabilities; founder/ Executive Director of Family Centered Initiative for Challenged Persons (FACICP); first elected female President of JONAPWD, the umbrella body of all disabled people's organisations in Nigeria. She is the first elected woman with a disability to lead a mainstream women's network, Global Fund for Women's Grantees Network, and serves on the Board of African Disability Forum (ADF).

*"Women and girls with disabilities all over the world suffer great invisibility and they are mostly the unsung heroines. I am particularly excited to support Her Abilities Award because it is an initiative that I believe would greatly promote visibility for women and girls with disabilities by rewarding their handwork, while practically working towards changing the unacceptable narrative that currently describes women and girls with disabilities globally."*