

Ms. Wheelchair Florida
By: Stephanie Woodward

On April 4th and 5th I had the pleasure of participating in the Ms. Wheelchair Florida competition. Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc. advocates for all people with disabilities and strives to bring awareness to all people with disabilities and the importance of inclusion in communities, employment, education, and housing. I decided to compete because I felt their mission and goals aligned well with the mission and goals of Disability Independence Group and my own passion for advocating for accessibility and integration of people with disabilities.

Seven women from across Florida competed and I had a great time getting to know them all. Each woman had a different issue that they were focusing on. My issue was ending domestic violence against women with disabilities, but other issues included providing more access to accessible recreational equipment, creating more accessible housing, and fighting for more accessibility throughout our communities. Beyond advocating for our specific issues, we also attended workshops that focused on Disability Rights laws, health and wellness, and advocacy.

When we were not in workshops we were in judging rounds where a panel of four judges asked us about ourselves, our issue, our experience in advocacy, and how we would work to advocate for the disability community in the future. Chelsie Hill from Push Girls was the celebrity judge for the competition and she was a lot of fun. When we were outside of the judging room, Chelsie spent her time hanging out with the competitors like we were all old friends.

All of the women competing had great platform issues and are great advocates, so I was very flattered when I was crowned as Ms. Wheelchair Florida 2014 at the pageant on Saturday night. It is a wonderful honor and I am excited to represent Florida!

As Ms. Wheelchair Florida I will spend the next year attending events and speaking engagements to promote disability rights and the fight to end domestic violence against women with disabilities. I will also attend the Ms. Wheelchair America competition in Long Beach, California in August!