

Lee Krizka comes to speak to students in MPH 609 (Cultural Context of Health) class on Wednesday, November 5, 2014.

Lee spoke about living with a disability and provided a demonstration of how her service dog, Merlot, assists her in her activities of daily living. Here is a biography from her: (<http://www.mobilityworks.com/blog/lee-krizka-profile/>):

My name is Lee, I am 41 years old and have been living with a disability since the age of 14. I have rare spinal cord arteriovenous malformations (AVMs), use a manual wheelchair and have an AWESOME service dog, Merlot, who went blind in Sept of 2012.

Merlot and I work at a local hospital in the adult physical rehab department, where I am a peer counselor. Not only is Merlot able to assist me in tasks like pulling my chair, opening doors, picking up dropped items and retrieving my phone, but he also does physical and occupational therapy with patients. We make a great team, both of us proving to those new to disability that you CAN overcome obstacles and challenges! I counsel patients and their families, assisting them with skills and techniques that will help them adjust to an adapted lifestyle.

I am also a public speaker for the Spinal Cord Assoc of IL. I travel to conferences, universities, hospitals etc, speaking about my experience of being a disabled person, as well as educating individuals about service animals. We also are part of the "Think First!!!" program, which caters to school age children. This is an informative presentation in which the children are made aware of spinal cord injuries (SCI), brain injuries (BI) and other disabilities, most which can be prevented through education.

Both Merlot and I are dedicated to living lives that, while WITH a disability, do not DISABLE us. Through our work and programs, we make a difference in other's lives. I believe everything happens for a reason. This is what both me and my Merlot were brought together to do... give others HOPE!