

# TALES TO DEMYSTIFY: NOT WELCOME HERE

BY *John G*

**SIGNAL**  
CLEVELAND

AS WE LOOK INTO HOUSING ACCESSIBILITY IN CLEVELAND, I FIGURED IT MIGHT HELP TO TAKE A STEP BACK TO THINK ABOUT WHO IT'S FOR.

DENISE FORSTER-PAULSEN IS MY LONG TIME NURSE PRACTITIONER AT METROHEALTH. SHE'S BEEN WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE SPINAL CORD INJURIES FOR OVER 30 YEARS. I FIGURED SHE COULD ANSWER A QUESTION FOR ME:

HOW MANY PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS ARE THERE IN CLEVELAND?

OH, I DON'T KNOW.

I DON'T THINK ANYBODY KNOWS, IT CHANGES SO QUICKLY.

THERE'S NO PERFECT WAY TO DEFINE —IN NUMBERS— THE PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY WHO USE ACCESSIBLE HOUSING.

THE U.S. CENSUS HAS HAD QUESTIONS ON DISABILITY GOING BACK TO 1830. BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL 2008 THAT IT ADDED A QUESTION ON ITS ANNUAL SURVEYS ABOUT WHAT IT CALLS "AMBULATORY DIFFICULTY."

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

A PERSON WHO HAS SERIOUS DIFFICULTY WALKING OR CLIMBING STAIRS.

THERE'S PEOPLE LIKE ME WHO USE A WHEELCHAIR AFTER AN INJURY. IT COULD BE A PERMANENT SPINAL CORD INJURY FROM A CAR CRASH OR A GUNSHOT.

BUT I'VE KNOWN OR SEEN PEOPLE WHO ARE BORN WITH CONDITIONS LIKE SPINA BIFIDA, AND GROW UP USING A WHEELCHAIR.

SOMETIMES AN ILLNESS WILL TAKE AWAY MOBILITY OVER TIME OR SUDDENLY. SENIORS OFTEN USE CANES, WALKERS OR WHEELCHAIRS AS THEY AGE.



IN 2021 THAT WAS ABOUT 10.3 PERCENT OF CLEVELANDERS OR BETWEEN **33,000** AND **37,000** PEOPLE. (THIS COUNTS PEOPLE WHO ARE 5 AND OLDER AND WHO DON'T LIVE FULL TIME IN A PLACE LIKE A NURSING FACILITY.)

EITHER WAY, IT'S NOT AN INSIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF CLEVELANDERS. THESE COULD BE YOUR FRIENDS OR RELATIVES OR NEIGHBORS. BUT MAYBE YOU DON'T SEE PEOPLE IN WHEELCHAIRS EVERYWHERE YOU GO.

MAYBE THE PLACES YOU GO AREN'T ACCESSIBLE TO THEM?

IT'S ROUGHLY THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IT WOULD TAKE TO FILL UP PROGRESSIVE FIELD (IF IT HAD A LOT MORE ACCESSIBLE SEATING!)

MORE ON THAT NEXT TIME!