July 16th 2015.

Ohio Association of Blind Students.

Present: Monica Malhotra (Mobility International USA), Juanita Lily and her teammate, Tanisha (Abroad with Disabilities), Kaiti Shelton, Emily Pennington, Aleeha Dudley.

Called to order at 7:33 PM.

Surviving and Thriving Abroad Panel:

Juanita spoke about her abroad experience in Costa Rica. She received wonderful support domestically and from her host mother and host grandmother abroad. She was able to go down several waterfalls and otherwise explore the country to the maximum and her host family was very accepting of her blindness. There were doubters who asked, “Are you sure you really want to go surfing?” “Can you swim?” Etc. They were fearful for Juanita’s safety because of her blindness and their unfamiliarity with blind people. Juanita stressed that communication and collaboration are key for those who want to study abroad. She has since advised study abroad programs on how to work with blind students, including how to make adventure sports like surfing accessible.

Tanisha is a study abroad advisor who spoke about what AWD was. She met Juanita in December and helped start AWD live, which is a skype platform where students can ask questions about study abroad prep. Tanisha is able to advise students on accessibility in different countries and in travel arrangements. Tanisha can also advise students on how to apply for scholarships to aid their financial situation in going abroad. She also facilitates connections between students and other members of staff who have been abroad in the same country and works with study abroad professionals to answer their questions about students with disabilities as well.

Kaiti spoke about her experiences in Jamaica through a personal story format. She mentioned how she took advantage of the resources offered through AWD and how she raised the money to go abroad. She mentioned that she was able to do most of what she wanted to do abroad and how the perceptions of the locals and the American trip directors impacted her. The unique challenges of being the first blind student in a study abroad program were also discussed by the panel at large at this point.

Monica Malhotra talked about the Blind Abroad (#blindabroad) campaign, which through MIUSA empowers blind students to go abroad and help students figure out how to make it happen. The campaign aims to break the misconceptions about what blind people can and can’t do abroad, and works with students and program directors to evaluate study abroad for the whole student including factors outside of their disability. She promoted the campaign and its tweets, weekly stories, the podcasts, etc.

The panel discussed the big fears of students who go abroad, such as how will my blindness be perceived by others? They also discussed how to work out problems when you’re the first blind student in a program so that more students can go abroad and receive accommodations. The importance of facilitating a good relationship between the international office and disability services was also discussed.

To contact the speakers:

Monica Malhotra’s email is: mmalhotra@miusa.org

To contact the Abroad with Disabilities team send a message to awd-team@abroadwithdisabilities.org. You can address that message to a specific team member and they will respond to you.

Check out Mobility International USA and Abroad with Disabilities on Facebook and twitter. AWD’s AWD Live skype sessions take place on Tuesday nights at 9:00 PM Eastern time. They also are responsive to Facebook messages sent to their page.

Reading and approval of May minutes was skipped due to absence of secretary.

Convention highlights were discussed. Some member favorites included the mock trial with Dr. Maurer playing Jacobus TenBroek, the successful world record attempt and the atmosphere at the event, and various technology demonstrations and general session presentations.

Drawing results: The following prizes were issued.

$50 Visa: Jemal Powell, Illinois.

$25 Amazon: Sherry Ruth, Ohio.

$25 Darden Restaurants: Sheri Albers, Ohio.

$20 Fannie May Candy Co: Karen Warner, Ohio.

$15 ITunes: Jim Barber, California.

$15 ITunes: David Mills, Ohio.

$10 Dominos and $10 Bath and Bodyworks: Barbara Pierce, Ohio.

$10 Tim Horton’s: Pam Allen, Louisiana.

$10 Chipotle: Deanna Lewis, Ohio.

Meeting adjourned at 8:52 PM.

Respectfully submitted: Kaiti Shelton