

Interview with Jill Allen

My name is Jill Allen and I live at Apartment 213 in a building owned by Burlington Housing called 57 Wharf Lane. I describe myself as Caucasian, queer, 36 years old. I use a wheelchair, and that is my main mode of transportation. I have a tortoise. She will come up in this interview.

My immediate family lives in the Essex and Winooski area and they will probably come up. And I'm really excited to be a part of this project.

I've lived here since November 2nd 2012. I've lived in the Burlington area...I was born in it. I grew up in Essex. I wanted to move here because there's been more disability services and access to cultural venues. So that is what brought me here. And I wanted to get out of the one room place that I lived and live with other people.

What do you think of when you think of home?

So, home is a place where I feel safe and I feel secure. And it's mine, and I can do what I want to with it. Which is interesting because this is the first place that I've lived that I've considered my home. Prior to this I lived in a one-bedroom apartment in South Burlington. I did not consider that my home because there was a lot of invasion of privacy, I felt, due to the aides that lived there. It just felt more like a nursing home and like everybody knew everybody's business because the aides would chart more than they had to, so somebody visiting would suddenly become my boyfriend because of the charts and it was just like, "really?" and that was annoying.

And so here I definitely feel like I have more autonomy, but at the same time, you know, my situation is very interesting because I have people who are my friends come and help me do tasks and I have to get temporary parking passes or them every three months because BHA has decided that each house only gets one parking space.

One of the things that really impinges on my ability to think of this as my home is that the Burlington Housing Authority is policing the lot and saying if you don't have a parking pass we're going to tow you. And that is really interesting because that is like a feeling of management overhead, which ideally I would not want in my home.

And home is also where...what I think of when I think of home is also impacted by where I grew up. I grew up in a house, so it was not an apartment. And it was owned by my parents. A house with trees around it that were not supported by guy lines. You could have birdfeeders. You could watch the wildlife. And that's really important. I want more green. I can see birds, but it's not enough. There's some part of me that wants more green. And I want more handicapped parking spaces.

Are there pieces of the community around here that you spend a lot of time going to that make this neighborhood part of your life?

I don't know if it's in the south end, but I go to the UU church. And there's this church next to them that has some cathedral, and it has all the trees. I wish I knew what it was called. But if I lived near an area it would be helpful. There is the little park over there but I call it creepy park, because its overgrown and it doesn't look tended too and it looks just very sad and it doesn't look like a place where children would play. I guess it used to be used by king street and they used to plant vegetables there.

Its called Little Park and I call it Creepy Park.

I like the cafes too. I like Mag's, and I like August First. I just wish August First was closer so that I could drive in my wheelchair. One of the difficult things for me is sidewalk tiles because they hurt my back. So if there were a bikeway it would help walking people and biking people but also people in wheelchairs for whom the sidewalk hurt.

So I like hanging out at those places. And I don't even know if my church is in the neighborhood. I don't know if the school where I work is in there either. It's called CP Smith. Is Edmunds in here [referring to the South End Development Plan]?

I can't get in to the King Street Youth Center. It's very annoying. I tried to be annoying and they were like yeah we usually have the kids come here but we have a giant step. I was annoyed that I couldn't get into the King Street Youth Center. That's why I asked where CP Smith was, and if there's an elementary school in the south end. I really like what they did with the multigenerational center and it would be cool if we id something like that.

I would just like to see...I just love kids. If there was a way that...Ideally I'd like to be able to work in my neighborhood. CP Smith is pretty close, but it's obviously not as close as Champlain elementary.

I work as an afterschool counselor. I supervise the kids after school. And you know, it's really...I think partnerships with certain neighborhoods and certain businesses would be really key. Particularly because I know there's a lot of people who live here that want to work. But I know one of the stumbling blocks for me is getting someone who will look at me with my disability and say wait, this is not an impediment, it's an asset.

So if the neighborhood were able to partner with certain key places like the chocolate place and the school and maybe some of the art places. Pathways...I saw they're doing a community wellness seminar which I think is great. It would help different people with disabilities feel more comfortable. It would promote

community because then whatever it was would say...This girl could say “we’re looking for volunteers to read to the kids.” and they’d know to come here.

But not everyone here has internet. I love Front Porch Forum, but it is on the internet. Each apartment here individually gets internet. You choose who you want for your internet provider. I purposefully didn’t choose Burlington Telecom because of the \$17 million loan scandal.

What are the things in the geographic community that make this place feel like home?

My church, even though it’s not in the neighborhood technically. UVM helps, because I get a lot of my peeps, those are who I call my people who work with me, but they’re also my friends. I get a lot of them from there.

You’ve also been involved in the Peace and Justice Center?

Yeah, it’s good that you brought that up Michelle because one of the things I’m looking for in terms of personal growth and develop relationships with people is the workshops that the Peace and Justice Center does. They did some on conflict resolution. In March they’re doing some on mindfulness. I like the lake, but access to it is difficult. I have to go in my manual wheelchair and it hurts. To actually get down in the water is next to impossible. But the lake is something that definitely makes Vermont feel like home. I don’t know if you remember, but do you remember when the moose came through? I know he didn’t belong here and he was stressed out, it was cool that he walked by my house. Even though I didn’t see him.

I wish they would do something with the back lot so it didn’t look like a horror movie set. Also, there’s space between the back of some buildings and the train tracks. Which is like, pay no attention to the bare glowing bulb over my head and the footsteps coming after me. It would make this place feel more homey if they did something to the area so it wasn’t so scary looking and empty.

There is talk of extending Battery Street and maybe putting in some buildings behind Maglianeros...

Affordable housing! Affordable housing! Affordable housing!

And definitely the animal park. The park for smaller animals. You could have part green part where the big animals can romp, and a garden part for the tortoises and ferrets and bearded dragons, bunnies.

It seems to me like you’re planning to stay in Burlington a long time

Yeah

What would you like to see as your planning for the future (work, transportation, etc.) that would make the city more livable for you?

Ramps. Because there's so many buildings...I can't even get into Handy's. I can't get into the Kings corner deli. I can't literally run down to the store. So ramps. And more handicapped parking that they actually plow during the winter instead of putting the snow in there. I know this is probably down town, but there needs to be more ramps on Church Street. Some of them just have this little tiny step and it's so annoying. I would like to see a space, a venue, for queer people. Like there was Pearls, but it closed. I'd like to see a café with tables in t, which sounds weird, but Maglianero's got rid of most of their tables, and I don't know why.

In terms of work

If there we're little outdoor parks with tables, would that be exciting to you?

Yeah, when it was warm out. But they have to have indoor options. Is Radio Bean here?

They're in the north end.

Some concert venues are really hard to access. Radio Beans like yeah, you can come here but you're going to have to go through the kitchen. So just like more...I go to theater and I take advantage of the Flynn voucher program and I take advantage of the Flynn space, but I would like to see the stuff at the Flynn space become...I would like to see them have packed vouchers too. Because I really like going to performances, but its an expensive hobby but it shouldn't be.

What was the thing I wanted to participate in this summer? There was a bocce club I was interested in looking at, which is like lawn bowling. So I asked them, do you think I could do this, and they were like well...we're willing to try. It's hard when they set up things on mainly grass because the grass is bumpy. So for me if you want to do things outside it helps if there's little paved areas so I don't have to go over the bumps. I'd like to see a play structure that a wheelchair could get on to. Like the accessible tree house. Maybe that is in the south end.

I'd like to see a ropes course too.

Do you use SSTA?

Yeah. I don't take what I call the big bus, in part because I can't wait out in inclement weather. And also in part because I feel like the times I've taken it, the drivers are always like, "what? there's a person in a wheelchair here? It's messing up my time schedule. I can't, like...baaaaaa." So it's not very inviting. Its difficult because there used to be a taxi service called Morph. It charged exorbitant rates which was illegal, and it folded.

And so, if I forget to schedule SSTA I have nothing. So I think there needs to be a taxi service that did what Morph did. Except they would charge what would be \$12 for a walking person if would become \$42 for someone in a wheelchair. Or something ridiculous which was totally illegal and VCIL even caught them and put them in the paper and they still did it.

So I feel like there needs to be something to fill the void that Morph left.

What about a trolley up and down the Pine Street corridor?

If they made the wheelchair spot bigger than the one they have on the city buses, and if it knelt, and if the drivers were like, "Ok, we recognize that there are slow moving people that are going to get on and off this thing, then I would be very interested.

What other community things are you involved with?

So I'm involved in the queer pop-up dances sometimes. I'm often involved in sometimes when I hear about refugee families...sometimes I will give things to them. I'm watching the stuff that pops up on the Black Lives Matter website and I would really like to attend them but they all seem to be happening at night, and it's cold out. And I want to be involved in and support the citizens of color and also learn from them. For me though the timing and where they're holding it and the fact that they want to hold them outside is prohibitive.

I was involved with Mercy Connections for a while. I really like that that's close by. That's a great resource that exists.

Are there needs for more community spaces, things to bridge folks from different backgrounds?

I know a multigen center would really do that. Mercy Connections does a lot of that because a lot of immigrant women will come there for ESL tutoring. Another community pool with better parking...I don't know if the Y is considered here...but you can't park there. It's really awkward.

For me in particular the indoor pool with a lift to help me get in and out, because that would mean I wouldn't have to go all the way to Essex to do that, which would be awesome.

I think a multigen center would really help the integration of classes and races and stuff. I think they used to have some sort of garden in Creepy Park. So maybe if it was a community garden thing, that might help. Poor Creepy Park.

So, whatever that place is, this one has its own newspaper...[North Ave News]...Some means of communication that you would get out to the people to

supplement Front Porch Forum and maybe even to replace some of the stuff. It would reach the people that weren't on the internet. And it was free, and it was there.

At Fletcher Free, people sign out garden tools. Maybe a group would... There would be all these art supplies and stuff and they would come together and they would sign them out but one of the stipulations was whatever art project you were doing had to enhance community in some way. And so that way they could go off and they might do the project by themselves but whatever they presented it or whatever it would have to enhance the community.

You know how there's calls to artists? One of the things they could do at the South End Art Hop would be to regularly showcase the creations that were done in this community art center by these collaborative groups using the community art tools. It's like everything from pastels to... some people do metal art. I know Fletcher Free Library has had really great success signing out garden tools. People love it. I'm thinking if you had them sign out stuff but not just like crayons and whatever... I know sometimes Echo does ceramic tiles and the tiles got put somewhere in the South End or something like that. That could be a really cool ongoing thing.

What about a community art space, with scheduled times/class and also open spaces? Would that satisfy what you're talking about with lending art supplies?

Yep. The class would some times be free and would sometimes be something that you would charge for. Art can even be dance. If there was somewhere there who was teaching yoga for everybody... Expressive movement I think is a term I've heard, one that applies to people with disabilities. If something like that were showcased at every art show or every art hop, I think it could be really community making.

Have you heard of a dance troupe in New York called Gimp?

I've heard of them. I also know there's a local dancer who lives around here. Their name is Toby McNutt. They are amazing and that's what they do. They dance. And they dance with their conditions, so they explore what it means to have the body that they do when they are dancing. I've heard of a piece called Gimp which I watched which was extremely powerful.

Does the press ever cover the Art Hop? That's good that it covers it. Is that the main event that happens that marks the South End?

It's one of the biggest events that happens in the South End.

One of the things that I'm thinking about right now in terms of art is there's lots of antique shops and there is Resource. So I'm wondering how we might be able to use the fact that there's old things at Resource and a scrap of this at this lumber place for people to get together and make this giant art piece that means something. There

could be some people that were talking about where they want the things to go, and some other people...I know this is not exactly right but there is this Calvin and Hobbes cartoon that says "I'll be the management, you be the labor. Go get some books." But so the people who can't physically move these giant things are talking to the people who can, and they help them build like a giant pyramid or something. And then they get to climb up the pyramid and it's a giant ropes course. I really like doing things that get me out of my wheelchair and give me different perspectives.

Where was the ropes course?

I went to one at UVM and I went to one at Pine Ridge. I think Pine Ridge is still around, but its become a mostly exclusive school for people with disabilities. So I don't think people with other disabilities have the same access to it.

I would like to see more...I like the notion of in August First how they just have books that you can read there, so you can do this introverted activity that I really like, and you can also watch the people go by and you can snag them and start up conversations.

Magliano's atmosphere is no longer conducive to that because they got rid of the tables. I don't who their audience is now but its really confusing because its not people who need tables.

I like the notion of a café/reading/non-creepy people watching space. And August First would be that place for me if the sidewalks didn't hurt for me to get up there.

Four way stops are difficult for me because I don't know which way to look because I kind of neglect the left side of what's going on. Because we don't have lights, we have four way stops...and I can't get up to push any of the buttons that say "Push here to walk."

If you could have the best south end possible, very inclusive, etc.?

I think it would look like Portland Oregon. "The dream of the 90s is alive in Portland." It's just automatic...they have bike paths everywhere, their bus system is...They have bus, trolley. It would probably have a-bizzilion more solar panel. They probably have underground wiring...Well plowed streets with plenty of handicapped parking. It would have trees that look like the belong there. That were not supported by guylines. Flowers, community art space. A gay space that I could go to. A café that I could roll up to and watch people.

I really like the idea of a communal art space. I would see a lot more ongoing dialogues and understanding between the New Americans and those of us that were born here...and I'd like to see more understanding, maybe more intermingling. I would like to see intermingling. But ideally I'd like to see what happened at my school: The kids just play with each other and from where I look it doesn't seem to

matter what color they are. I think its important for people to know about cultural heritage and to be proud of it, but I don't want it to be like, "we're interacting because of an 'ism'"

One of the other things I have issue with is all these senior living communities. If you're 55 or older you go over there, and you don't live with all ages anymore. I would like a very, age, ability, race, sexual orientation integrated South End so that I could buzz everywhere and there were no cracks and they plowed everything...with a tortoise park.

[Question about the tortoise]

Sonny...I've had her for 11 years. She will live between 20-90 years. I'd really like to see...I guess this isn't so much a south end thing, but a recognition among Housing Authority or the people that always say 'no pets' of the good a pet could do for you. But there also needs to subsidies or help to help you take care of it. Yeah, you can get one, but have fun getting those subsidies.

Is Echo in the South End? I wish that Echo could bring in live animals. I clearly don't know where the South End lives, but hopefully...

Did you interview some new Americans yet?

Some Conversation about group painting of Mural

One of the things that I was telling Michelle initially that its really important to me that its not just white people that go on there, but people of every shade, every age, every disability...somebody in a Wheelchair

