

## Empowering People with Disabilities for Japan

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The community of people with disabilities is one of the largest groups in the world—a diverse array of people live with some sort of disability, yet they aren't very visible within the media. According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the number of people with disabilities in Japan is 9.36 million, meaning that 7.4% of Japan's population lives with some form of disability. It is also reported that the population of people with intellectual disabilities is almost two times higher than that of physical disability.

Our data reveals that from the visuals downloaded in 2020 for Japan, under 1% included people with disabilities, whereas, according to our Visual GPS research, 76% of consumers in Japan believe that companies and brands should be involved in supporting issues and causes that create social good in society. It's an indication that as an industry, we're missing out on a big part of the story, despite best efforts.

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Brands and the media still largely leave people with disabilities out when they decide to portray diversity and inclusion in their casting. When they do try, the representation of the community isn't as seamless as it should be: actions seen as positive from one angle might be seen as negative from another. The late Stella Young, an Australian comedian and disability rights activist, called the portrayal of people with disabilities, "inspirational to the non-disabled people," and "[inspiration porn](#)," and pointed out that what people with disabilities have to overcome is not their bodies or illnesses, but a society that singles them out and treats them as objects. Similarly, NHK's educational TV program "[Bari-Bara - Information Variety for People with Disabilities](#)" also conducted [a survey in 2016](#) on what people thought of "inspirational programs about people with disabilities." 90% of people with disabilities responded that they felt uncomfortable with such programs, while 45% of people without disabilities responded that they were moved by them. This shows that people with disabilities want visualization as a part of their daily lives, not just for special occasions or as a special entity that moves them.

So, how do we truly begin addressing these findings and start being more inclusive? As seen in episodes of *Bari-Bara* and the film [37 Seconds](#), disability is intersectional and including representation across ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, gender identification and culture is absolutely important. Also, highlighting stories around all traditionally underrepresented voices which were successfully featured in Tokai TV's [Living with Invisible Disabilities](#) campaign would help us take steps to build a more inclusive society that understands, accepts and positively engages with the community. It is critical to always check back in with yourself and ask whether you are unconsciously choosing stereotypical representations of the community in all circumstances. Break stereotypes of every kind and the combination will allow for more just and sensible visuals.

**When choosing visuals of people with disabilities, ask yourself:**

- Are you representing people by more than their disability?
- Are you portraying disability as a natural part of someone's identity, instead of disability as something that needs to be "cured," "fixed" or overcome?
- Are you showing the whole range of life experiences and relationships that a person with disabilities may have?
- Are you featuring people with cognitive or invisible disabilities?
- Are you showing a multidimensional experience of who they are?
- Are you showing a whole person rather than only prosthetic limb or other accommodation?