



A Special Evening – 19 Years of Supporting Possibilities for Adults with Disabilities

April 12, 2019

By [Karen Wald](#), Senior Vice President, Corporate Affairs & Chief of Staff, Alliance Data and [Michael Thomas](#), Executive Director of My Possibilities

Engaging, educating and empowering by Karen Wald



Sunday, April 7 marked the 19th year of [A Special Evening](#), an annual Dallas/Fort Worth-area benefit concert event that supports [My Possibilities](#) and the organization's [LaunchAbility Career Services program](#). The organization offers socialization, education, therapy, training and job placement support for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Alliance Data is honored to have been a sponsor and participant of A Special Evening for 18 consecutive years. Each year, we hear inspiring stories of individuals who shatter societal norms and expectations and find gainful employment through these programs. Alliance Data is committed to partnering with My Possibilities because diversity and inclusion of all skills and abilities is beneficial to our business, contributes to our company culture, and helps the DFW community at large.

There are approximately 280,000 individuals in North Texas with IDD, but we don't focus on their limitations. My Possibilities' IDD population is more appropriately known as HIPsters (Hugely Important People), and our organizations work together to uncover each HIPster's untapped potential. At Alliance Data, we employ three My Possibilities HIPsters at our corporate office in Plano, TX and one client at our Epsilon office in Irving, TX. Of note, this year, we will celebrate one client's 15th year working at Alliance Data!

I serve on the My Possibilities board and played a role in the organization's merger with LaunchAbility in 2018. Both organizations were stellar on their own and have now found even more success by bringing together their respective areas of expertise. I look forward to continuing to support My Possibilities' noble endeavors because diversity in thought, skill and experience is vital to the development of a successful and progressive workforce.

Throughout my time supporting LaunchAbility and My Possibilities, I have had the pleasure of working with Michael Thomas, Executive Director of My Possibilities. I asked him to reflect on Sunday's event and his daily work with North Texas HIPsters.

Changing the landscape for adults with IDD by Michael Thomas



At My Possibilities, we courageously and relentlessly pursue the full, untapped possibilities of our HIPsters, making every day count. Unfortunately, around only 9 percent of adults with disabilities are employed and it is our mission to change that.

We started in 2008 with just ten HIPsters and now serve 400 each week, in our educational program and an additional 200 in the community, through Career Services. Over the last year, we opened a new, larger campus in Plano, TX and realized our dream of offering more continuing education and lifelong learning programs. We model the educational environment like a college campus with unique spatial designs tailored for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In 2018, My Possibilities placed 36 HIPster graduates in competitive employment and our goal is to top that in 2019.

With Alliance Data's generous support, we not only receive funding to help us execute our daily programming and fundraising events, but we also receive sage counsel from our board, as supported by Karen Wald and others. Alliance Data serves as a foundational supporter and for nearly two decades, our organizations have been working together to change cultural perceptions and to uncover meaningful job opportunities for North Texas HIPsters.

I would be remiss if I didn't also thank our performing artist this year. We were thrilled to partner with singer and songwriter John Ondrasik and his band Five For Fighting. Their hit song *Superman* holds special meaning within the autism community and reverberates across all of the IDD population. A line from the song sums up one of My Possibilities' core values, "I'm just out to find, the better part of me."

Five For Fighting's performance on Sunday at the Winspear Opera House was full of moments of emotion, celebration and some solid rock and roll. John has commented about how he has seen music open people up and we saw that happen in every event attendee and in our HIPsters. One particularly special moment was when the My Possibilities Choir performed the opening act and sang Five For Fighting's song *100 Years*. A comment John made on stage speaks to our daily mission, "What if we took the impossible and made it My Possibilities?"

I want to thank our incredible event chairs, Beth and Steve McGaw and co-chairs Chris and David Downs—their tireless energy made this Special Evening one to remember. And of course to all our sponsors, the Winspear Opera House and many others who made the concert a success. We look forward to 2020 when we will celebrate 20 years of A Special Evening!

Our efforts to support the North Texas IDD community are ongoing. If you missed out on joining us at A Special Evening, you can help My Possibilities in other ways. We are a candidate to win up to \$225,000 in United Way's Social Innovation Accelerator competition. The competition promotes innovative ideas that are designed to solve social issues in a creative way. Until April 16, you can vote once a day, and sharing to social media counts as a second vote. Please vote for My Possibilities daily, by visiting VoteMP.org, clicking on the 'vote' button, and then sharing to your social media channels.

As Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs and Chief of Staff, Karen oversees initiatives that protect and enhance Alliance Data's enterprise reputation and stakeholder engagement across internal and external groups. Her area of oversight includes human resources, including talent recruiting and retention, and diversity and inclusion; internal and external communications and marketing; strategic insights; corporate responsibility; and public policy/government relations.

[Read more by Karen Wald.](#)