



# ALISON'S WORLD – ELEVATED

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REHAB CASE STUDY

I would like to share the story of Alison, a 37-year-old woman with cerebral palsy (CP).

Like a lot of kids born with CP, Alison received her first reverse walker at the age of 7, which she used until sixth grade. By then the school hallways became too much for her to navigate safely, trying to ambulate to class. Shortly thereafter she was approved for her first power wheelchair. This was a huge asset for Alison but, as time would tell, it was only the beginning of the challenges she would face as a power wheelchair user. The first thing she had to learn was how to navigate the busy halls throughout her school in a power chair without running into other kids or them running into her. She could keep up with their speed, but being a foot “shorter” than the average student made it hard for her to see and be seen. While her new freedom allowed her to go more places, she found that the challenges she was experiencing at school carried over in society. Moving at seated height was something new. People coming and going would step in front of her, cut her path of travel off or just stop, especially in big crowds. She could go to the mall, but the ability to reach things was a major challenge. Despite these challenges, Alison persisted.

Fast forward six years. After high school, Alison started the next chapter of her life: college. She faced many of the same challenges, but now she had to navigate through bigger halls, longer distances, additional obstacles, and more people. She was still stuck at “belt height.” Despite this, she worked hard and, in 2003, earned her Associates Degree in Human Services.

This accomplishment afforded her many new opportunities, although she still had physical barriers she had to overcome with her wheelchair. She continued to rely on personal care attendants and family to help her with everyday tasks. Anything that was above her head was out of reach and required assistance. Simple things we all take for granted, like cooking, cleaning or doing her own laundry, required help from others. Her life was on track, but her power chair still held her back in so many ways.

Alison moved to an accessible apartment in the city, with her service dog. She is resourceful and, while it is a fantastic opportunity for her to reside in an area with a diverse culture, she found that city living presented additional challenges. Her number one concern was being seen by drivers when she crossed streets. Her power chair had a standard power seat elevator, but she rarely used it because it slowed life down to a snail's pace. She had to stop her forward progression to elevate a mere 6 inches, it took “forever” to get all the way up, and the chair's speed dropped to 1.5 mph once she got there. In reality, this meant that crossing a busy street in an elevated position so she could be seen could take up to two light sequences. It was unsafe, unproductive and unrealistic.

All of this led Alison to pursue a highly functional power adjustable seat height system on her next chair. She reached out to me via Facebook and mutual acquaintances to ask if I could help with some seating needs. She had heard about



PICTURE 1

Alison confidently entering the stadium with the crowd to watch her favorite team win!

new technology and she loved her current power chair, but it was starting to show signs of disrepair from very active use and hard city living.

Alison had seen social media posts I shared highlighting one of Quantum Rehab's power wheelchairs and the benefits of this new technology. The more I posted, the more she researched it. She really could see all the benefits of what power adjustable seat height could do for her in all aspects of her world as she knew it. She was on a mission to get the new chair so she could benefit from all it had to offer and perhaps go to places she had only dreamed of. In Alison's words, she was “stuck going through life waist high.”

As she would explain to me, her worst nightmare was navigating through public crowds which she would try to avoid because, “people don't even notice you when you are that low, and if they do they look, they look down

on you, like you are beneath them.” I wanted to find a way to help Alison achieve her goals and get her out of a world where she had gone unnoticed for almost 30 years. On top of that, I wanted to do something special for her, as I try to do with all users I work with.

I knew Alison was a huge St. Louis Blues hockey fan from her personal Facebook page, and when she let me know she was getting a new power wheelchair with power adjustable seat height, I wanted to give her the option to deck out a chair to fit her personality. I brought the idea up to her and her provider of choice to see how she would feel about a St. Louis Blues themed wheelchair. Luke Moore, ATP/SMS, CRTS® for Therapeutic Specialties, Inc. was on board with the idea. My biggest concern was going too far with my creativity and have her be stuck in a themed chair she hated. I asked her how extreme she wanted to go, and her response was, “I trust your judgment!” Off I went.

With all the power wheelchair and seating color options, it was easy to match fabric to the back, decking out the unit in her favorite team colors.

She was beyond excited at the time of delivery, got in and took off. She now tells me, “this chair is making me famous!” She is able to elevate quickly while driving, and move at 3.5 mph, faster than average walking speed, in the elevated position. She gets compliments everywhere she goes and her confidence level has soared. But, as “awesome” and “cool” as the chair looks, it still didn’t equal what iLevel has been able to add to her life. On her social media pages, she posts her life’s adventures. One of Alison’s recent posts on social media reads:

“I think this needs to be posted so people understand about my technology, and why it’s a safer option than standard wheelchairs.

Let me ask you a question. How does it feel to give a hug?? Pretty cool, huh? Well, as a wheelchair user, most of us only hug belt loops or the ‘hugee’ comes down to our level.

Well, with new technology, that ALL changes.

I can hug at eye level, take cool selfies and not break anyone’s knees; I feel included. Before, I could elevate, but I most of the time wouldn’t, because it took so long. Now, I can drive and elevate. It means confidence, inclusion and independence.

And most recently, safety. I can be seen by cars, when other wheelchair users can’t, because of the height of a car versus the height of a standard wheelchair. Believe me when I tell you that my safety is my top priority, and I’ve never felt safer in a wheelchair. So, God willing, there might be fewer accidents because of technology that allows wheelchair users to do everyday things like crossing a street.”

I had the pleasure of accompanying Alison to her first hockey game with her new power chair (see Figure 1). She was hesitant at first to drive around at eye level, but after some encouragement, you could see the difference in her confidence entering and exiting the game, especially when the crowds parted as she was driving elevated. She could see where she was going and plan her route, but most importantly, she was seen and quickly became the coolest hockey fan in the stadium.

Of course, beyond social and emotional benefits, the functional aspects of power adjustable seat height dramatically changed her life as well (see Figure 2). Alison posted:



PICTURE 2

Alison is now able to do the “mundane” chores most people take for granted without assistance.

“I love how easy everything is in my house with this chair! Laundry going, about to cook, do dishes and get ready for another chillier yet, day tomorrow;” and

“I’m so amazed still at how easy doing life is with this new chair. Laundry’s done and hung, transferring while changing is no sweat, and getting around the kitchen. Seriously. Changes the game. Come observe if you don’t believe me. I’ll bake cookies!

Thank you to everyone who made this technology a reality for not only me, but so many others.”

If you ever have questions whether power adjustable seat height should be justified, remember Alison’s story or just talk to someone who has experienced its life-inspiring benefits. After all, it’s a technology that truly elevates lives.

## CONTACT THE AUTHOR

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