Hello everyone. My name is Ryan Duncanwood. I currently live in Redding California. That is in northern California about an hour and a half north of the City of Paradise. I am sure you have all heard of the horrible fire there. My mother lived in Paradise and lost her home. Luckily she is safe and now is temporarily living at my house. It is now my turn to help her. My mom was the driving force behind my education and personal growth. When I was young some people thought I was not going to be capable of learning. My mom knew better. I learned to read and i knew what I wanted to say but no one could understand me except for a few words. It was very frustrating. When I was 10 years old I got my first communication device. My parents had me work with a linguist to practice with my device, improve my vocabulary and writing skills. I have not stopped talking since. I moved into my own home when I was 19 and now I own my own home. I rely on a supported living agency to help me with my daily needs. They travel with me too. This is not always easy because I fly somewhere usually 12 to 15 times a year. Apparently I am not a home body. I have a passion for advocacy for people with disabilities so, I fly to conferences and board meetings all over the country. Sometimes even international conferences. I am a member of People 1st and have been on the executive board. I was on the Self Advocates Becoming Empowered board for many years. Currently I am on the California Arc board. I also have a micro enterprise business called Dare to Dream. I sell DVD's about my life and tee shirts that I call ability wear. The money I earn from this business helps pay for all my travel needs. Its also a great way to meet people. I have always pushed the limits of what people think a person with a disability can do. So in my spare time I like to water ski, snow ski, camp, kayak and even sky dive. I am telling you about my life so I can show you an example of what life can be for someone who cannot speak when they find a voice through alternative communication. For those of you who work with people with disabilities I encourage you not to give up on them. I am sure they have hidden talents and their own hopes and dreams for their life. We live in a world of technology. Don't deny the people you work with the technology they need to communicate. It is not an easy task. It takes commitment and many years of practice but, it is worth it. Believe me they all have something to say. If you help a person find their voice there is no limit to what they can do. There is nothing as important as vocal communication to connect people. I hope you have seen the movie My Left Foot about the life of Christy Brown. If not, please find it on Netflix and watch it. Mr. Brown could not speak but became one of the first well known writers with cerebral palsy and this is what he had to say about having a spoken voice. "Writing may be immortal but it does not bridge the gap between two human beings as the voice may. Oh, I would rather have an hour's fierce argument with pal or a few moments of soft chatter with a girl than to write the greatest book on Earth." In closing remember having a voice connects you to others and if you have a voice you can advocate for yourself and live the life you want to live. Those who work with children with disabilities can help set the stage for their students to have an amazing life. Thank you for listening to me today. Please check out my website at

WWW.RYANDUNCANWOOD.COM.