Descriptive Transcript for YouTube video “The Carrie Buck Distinguished Fellow for 2025: Laura Millar”

Laura Millar, 2025 Carrie Buck, Distinguished Fellow. Laura, a white, blind woman with light brown long hair, sits in front of a brick wall and holds her white cane.

LAURA: When we give people the language of ableism, when we explain what it is on both sides for the disabled person to understand and for the non-disabled person to understand, then we can have a healthier, safer society.

Carrie Buck Distinguished Fellowship. A black and white photo of Carrie Buck seated with her mother, Emma, alongside the Lurie Institute for Disability Policy logo.

Rebecca Cokley, the Disability Rights Program Officer at the Ford Foundation, a white woman with dwarfism. She has orange hair, freckles, and wears a black and plaid dress. She sits in front of a brick wall while interviewed.

REBECCA: Carrie Buck was a woman with disabilities who became pregnant and was the subject of a Supreme Court case in *Buck vs. Bell*. And the decision was that she should be involuntarily sterilized because, in the words of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, three generations of imbeciles are more than enough.

Ayesha Elaine Lewis, Senior Staff Attorney at the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund. Ayesha is a Black woman with disabilities wearing a grey sweater, pink tortoise shell glasses, and her hair is long and styled into small twists. She is interviewed over Zoom with a blurred background.

AYESHA: It talked about the fear that too many “undesirable” people being born would sap the strength of society. These ideas are disgusting. They were inspirational to the Nazis in Germany. And we should remember this part of our history and reckon with it fully.

A foamboard poster promoting Laura's Carrie Buck Fellowship Keynote talk at Brandeis University.

Maddie Crowley, a Communications Specialist at the Lurie Institute for Disability Policy. A white person with disabilities. Maddie has blonde curly hair and wears clear glasses and a monochromatic outfit. Maddie sits in front of a brick wall while interviewed.

MADDIE: So, the Carrie Buck Fellowship is really an opportunity for the Lurie Institute and Brandeis as a university to reconcile with some of the harms of the *Buck v. Bell* court decision.

The audience listens to Rebecca and Laura's keynote. They are gathered in Brandeis's Zinner Forum. An open event space with walls of windows and the flags of countries from around the world.

MADDIE: It was actually such a wonderful opportunity for an individual to come and educate people about people with disabilities and how that intersects with reproductive care access, reproductive justice, and things like that.

Laura speaks to Rebecca during Keynote with an ASL interpreter behind her.

MADDIE: When we're searching for a new Carrie Buck fellow, we're really looking for someone, who brings a part of this conversation that hasn't really been heard before. Someone that really cares about both disability justice and reproductive justice. Laura brings a really interesting approach to this as a blind, queer woman. She has come into this opportunity with the Fellowship, really bringing people to her level in a really accessible way to educate people about her experience and the experience of her community.

LAURA: For about nine years. I didn't know that I had an entire community out there, of disabled and blind people who had the same fears. Sexual ableism is the devaluing of disabled people, especially around reproductive health or sexuality.

VOICE OVER: Many states have laws where parental disability is grounds for termination of parental rights.

User explores an online map of the United States that shows termination of parental rights by state and disability type. The map was created by the National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities. It shows what states can terminate parental rights based on a combination of disabilities.

LAURA: Seeing somebody is not sexual. It might be around reproductive health choices and removing the right to parent. It could just be not wanting to date a disabled person or thinking that a disabled person's life might be less than or inferior. The most insidious parts of sexual ableism is when we internalize the messages around it. And so I know for myself as a blind woman in my early 20s, when I was first diagnosed, I had those questions: who will want to date me? Will I ever be a parent? Those questions were rooted in sexual ableism, and I just didn't have role models. I didn't know that there were hundreds and thousands of blind parents out there.

REBECCA: Laura's work is so incredibly exciting to me. I think the thing that stuck out the most was particularly the conversations around consent, because people don't talk to people with disabilities about consent.

LAURA: And so, if we're talking about parents, teachers, or educators, that may often look like creating a classroom that is consent centered, that centers the child in their autonomy and their agency and starts planting those messages from a really young age.

Laura Millar, standing in front of a table, full of sexual health information with tactile models.

LAURA: And I do work to show the parents, teachers, and educators how the way that they are modeling consent and healthy relationships will determine how those students grow up, and the relationships that they go into.

MADDIE: We don't talk about disability and sexuality. We don't talk about disability and sex, like, at all. Laura is such a fantastic fellow because she has such an ability to connect with people and make people feel comfortable in talking about these things.

AYESHA: People with disabilities often have higher rates of sexual abuse and exploitation. And so being able to have sex ed that teaches people about consent and how to protect themselves is even more important for people with disabilities.

REBECCA: Laura's work fights back against the invisibility of disabled people being able to talk about sexual agency, being able to talk about pleasure. If we as a community claim that we want our folks to feel like they can bring their whole selves to the table, this is a really important part of it.

LAURA: So I could tell you, I could write a dissertation about how sexual ableism impacts disabled people as they're trying to start families, whether it's from medical devices that aren't accessible, pregnancy tests or fertility tests, ovulation kits that aren't accessible, all the way up to doctors who may not believe that disabled people should be parents.

AYESHA: There was one case where a blind couple had a child. And at the hospital, the medical staff reported that the child wouldn't be safe because the child had blind parents. And so, they weren't allowed to take their child home with them. This is not an uncommon occurrence for people with disabilities.

MADDIE: There's such an expectation to be the perfect parent, and then there's this huge [Maddie emphasizes the difference in expectation by raising their arm] other layer of what that looks like to be a perfect parent with a disability, because a lot of people think people with disabilities aren't really capable of anything, let alone having a job, having a home, having children.

LAURA: The medical system used to practice eugenics doing forced sterilizations. And now we really have turned to the courts to see who can be fit for parenthood.

MADDIE: More than anything, we really need to understand what parenting can look like for a person with a disability. but help providers, help social workers and other people know that, oh, this is just how this parent is parenting. It's not actually that this child is in danger. It's different. Not worse.

Laura walks hand-in-hand with her son Aiden at the front of the pan disability contingent in the Women’s March. The group includes people using canes, walkers, and wheelchairs, showing a wide range of disabilities. Many marchers wear pink hats, and the atmosphere is welcoming and energetic as they move down a city street.

LAURA: When I'm talking to people who are newer to blindness or to youth, teens, I am letting them know this language of ableism. I think that it is important that they understand that it is systemic, that it is not them. I think that if they have a negative belief or attitude or thought around blindness, that they stop and question where that came from.

AYESHA: Participating in their community, having economic independence and freedom. People being able to make decisions about their own lives. All of that is the world that Carrie Buck deserved.

A close-up selfie of Laura and a young Aiden, both smiling warmly at the camera. Aiden is wearing a flat cap and a plaid shirt. Laura and her son Aiden are sitting together on the grass with her retired guide dog Tabby lying beside them.

AYESHA: to be able to raise their children and share the love that they have in their hearts with the people they care about.

Laura and her son Aiden are sitting together on the grass with her retired guide dog Tabby lying beside them.

AYESHA: Carrie Buck deserved so much more. We owe it to their memory to create a better world where people with and without disabilities are able to thrive, to choose for themselves and to live the fullest life that they want to live.

LAURA: I've been blind for 21 years, and for the first 13 of those years, I wanted nothing to do with the blind community. What I didn't realize was that was internalized ableism, that I had adopted those messages of blindness being a bad thing or something to be pitied.

3 images. First, Laura Millar, walking in pride parade, holding a sign in the air that says blind and proud. Holding her Guide Dog in the other hand, with the image of the lighthouse pride contingent behind her. Second, a diverse group of individuals with varying disabilities participating in the cross-disability contingent at the Women's March in Oakland. They are holding a banner that reads "The American Dream Must Be Accessible." Then, third, a group marches in the San Francisco Pride Parade as part of a pan disability contingent. They hold colorful handmade signs, including "BLIND and PROUD," "Perky Resilient Involved Determined Excited BLIND," and "Blind Proud," in front of the Ferry Building, celebrating blindness and disability pride.

LAURA: But what I found when I came to community, when I learned the language of ableism, and when I certainly started to learn the language of sexual ableism, was that it wasn't me. It was society. It was systemic. And it was something that then I had a roadmap to change.