

# National Leadership Consortium **Bulletin**

Leading  
Anti-Ableist Efforts

**NATIONAL  
LEADERSHIP  
CONSORTIUM**



ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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# National Leadership Consortium **Bulletin**

## About the Bulletin

The National Leadership Consortium Bulletin is a free, web-based publication dedicated to providing relevant, trustworthy, and thought-provoking information to leaders, practitioners, and people with disabilities and their families involved in the field of developmental disabilities support services. The Bulletin will serve as a bridge between scientific journals and day-to-day leadership, exploring timely research and policy issues in the leadership and disabilities fields with the aim of promoting organizational change and assisting leaders to support people with disabilities to experience inclusive, valuable, and meaningful lives.

## About the National Leadership Consortium

### Leadership, Values and Vision: Transforming Lives and Organizations

The National Leadership Consortium was founded in 2006 to develop current and future generations of disability sector leaders to have the knowledge, skills, and values needed to transform services and systems to be responsive to the needs, wants, and rights of people with disabilities. Our mission is to provide quality training, technical assistance, and support aimed at the development of values-based leadership in disability sector leaders. The National Leadership Consortium is focused on promoting the rights of people with disabilities to direct their services and lives and to fully belong in their chosen communities. One way the National Leadership Consortium works to meet this mission is through a nationally recognized, intensive leadership development program, the Leadership Institute. These in-person or virtual trainings focus on knowledge, skills, and supports leaders need to transform systems and organizations in the disability service sector.



## Contact Us

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# Introduction: Leading Anti-Ableist Efforts

Ableism exists virtually everywhere. So, as leaders in the disability service sector, you are likely acutely aware of many ways that it persists in your organizations and communities. In fact, according to recent research, we as leaders likely practice, participate in, and perpetuate ableism in our [words](#), [attitudes](#), and even [actions](#). At the same time, we've heard more and more leaders and organizations talk about anti-ableism over the last few years as part of the Disability Rights Movement, in organizational strategy, and more. This [quote from Sins Invalid](#) reminds us that we need to proceed carefully to make sure that our words and actions align.

*"In recent years, on websites, on flyers and in informal conversations, we've witnessed people add the word "justice" onto everything disability related — from disability services to advocacy to disability studies. This is done without a significant shift in process or goals, as if adding the word "justice" brings work into alignment with disability justice. It doesn't."*

If you are less familiar with the term or the work being done around anti-ableism, it might be helpful to start by defining ableism. This description from an [interview](#) between Alice Wong (creator of the [Disability Visibility Project](#)) and Dr. Michelle Nario-Redmond (author of [Ableism: The Causes and Consequences of Disability Prejudice](#)) provides a comprehensive overview of what it is and how we see it in ourselves, our organizations, and our communities.

*"...the prejudice and discrimination toward individuals and groups simply because they are disabled. Similar to definitions of prejudice more broadly, the ABCs of ableism include our Affective, emotional and attitudinal reactions; the Behaviors, actions, practices and policies that discriminate, and the Cognitive beliefs, stereotypes and ideologies that go beyond general negativity."*

Being anti-ableist comes in many forms, and essentially, it's about the work people do to actively address and reduce ableism. In this issue, we hear from several disability sector leaders, activists, and allies who connect their work to anti-ableism in a variety of ways. Kasey Hodges, the Ethics and Mission Integration Director at the Arkansas Support Network, shares strategies to incorporate anti-ableism practices when leading organizations that provide services to people with disabilities. Shelly Christensen and Ashley Nyaley discuss changing cultural attitudes toward disability in the media and faith communities. Liz Weintraub offers insight into her work as a policy wonk and her efforts to make policy accessible to people who are most impacted by it. Leigh Anne McKingsley and Jost Branch highlight the benefits of hiring people with lived experience to lead community education in their discussion of the Pathways to Justice program. Kelly Friedlander and Nills Skudra discusses a peer mentorship approach to promote advocacy and policy work, and Amanda Rich and Cory Gilden provide an overview of research on ways that we as leaders can become anti-ableist by challenging our biases and everyday practices and words as well as strategies to hold our organizations and systems more accountable to anti-ableist practices.

This issue includes a range of perspectives on ableism and anti-ableist practices, both from people with lived experiences and people who do this work alongside people with disabilities. We aim to center the voices of people with disabilities and, at the same time, recognize that it is the responsibility of people without disabilities to figure this out and teach each other how to address ableism in our organizations and field.

As always, thank you for reading. We hope this issue will challenge you, make you (at least a bit) uncomfortable, and offer you practical tools and actionable strategies that you can implement to become more anti-ableist. We welcome your thoughts and comments; just email us at [bulletin@natleadership.org](mailto:bulletin@natleadership.org).

With Gratitude,

*Caitlin Bailey*

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# Ableism: What Leaders Should Know

*By Amanda Rich*

- Ableism refers to negative attitudes, discrimination, and bias toward people with disabilities.
- There are high rates of ableism across our society, including in disability service systems.
- Ableism hurts people's quality of life and is a barrier to meaningful inclusion. Leaders must be aware of ableism and its impact, take action to resist it, and address the harm it has caused.

There is an old joke that goes something like, "What do you call a group that is 90% White and says that they have 0% biases?" The punch line: "a nonprofit organization." As we let the uncomfortable chuckles subside and allow the collective grip on our pearls loosen, this joke may give rise to some important questions like, "Is our organization representative of the communities we serve?" and "What role might bias towards people with disabilities (and other groups) play in our organization's operation and in the lives of the people we support?" The answers to these questions have profound implications on leadership, our organizations, and most importantly, the lives of people with disabilities organizations support.

[Ableism](#) is generally defined as bias, discrimination, stereotyping, prejudice, and social oppression towards people with disabilities. Ableism involves the social structures, including attitudes, beliefs, actions, and systems, that support the idea that there is a "right" way to be in the world in terms of mental, emotional, and physical functioning.

[Beliefs and attitudes](#) toward disability are not always conscious. Individual's and groups' conscious (explicit) and unconscious (implicit) attitudes toward disability shape people with disabilities' interpersonal relationships, opportunities, and life experiences. Some people may consciously believe that they hold no bias or prejudice but may unconsciously act in ways that exclude or marginalize people with disabilities and/or other social groups.

Additionally, oppression and marginalization of people with disabilities are not siloed from the oppression and marginalization of other social groups. Discrimination or marginalization based on gender, race, and sexual orientation, for example, may also impact people with disabilities' experiences in uniquely challenging and complex ways. When people identify with and experience discrimination because of belonging to more than one marginalized group, it is known as "[intersectionality](#)."

## The Impact of Ableism

The lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are profoundly shaped by ableism. [Studies have found](#) that people are more likely to support the exclusion of people with psychiatric, intellectual, and developmental disabilities from their community-based schools and employment and have restrictions on their intimate relationships compared to non-disabled people and people with other types of disabilities. Additionally, people are more likely to support [paternalistic](#) actions such as unwanted help or practices that restrict people's freedom to provide "protection" for people with mental disabilities. Across many types of disabilities, those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as psychiatric disabilities, face the highest degree of [prejudice](#).

Ableism presents on many different [societal levels](#). For instance, at the institutional level, it may manifest as inequitable healthcare access, exclusionary systems of care, and inequitable experiences with the criminal justice system. [Studies have found](#) that states with higher rates of ableism or

disability-related prejudice spend less on their funding on home and community-based services independent of the state's wealth or size. At the interpersonal level, ableism may show up in a lack of respect towards or use of power over another person. [Research](#) suggests that people with IDD who are treated with more respect have greater quality of life than people who are treated with less respect. Ableism may also be internalized when a disabled person consciously or unconsciously believes negative societal messages about disability. They may find they want to distance themselves from other people with disabilities. [Internalized ableism](#) negatively impacts people's health, wellbeing, and positive identity development.

All types of ableism, like other types of discrimination, are bad for people's health and wellbeing. [Studies have found](#) that people with IDD face a lower quality of life than people without IDD. This includes higher rates of preventable diseases, lower rates of trust in systems of care, higher rates of victimization, and less access to choice and control in one's life. Studies on discrimination towards other groups have found a "[dose-response](#)" relationship between perceived experiences with discrimination and negative health outcomes, meaning the more discrimination people experienced, the worse their health outcomes. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) with intellectual disabilities often experience even [lower quality of life](#) than White people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

## Ableism in the Disabilities Field

No human is immune to bias, including people who work in the disability service system. A [study from 2023](#) looked at disability professionals' (including educators, direct support professionals, researchers, clinicians, human service administrators, and executive leaders) conscious and unconscious attitudes toward disability. The study found high rates of unconscious and conscious bias toward people with disabilities across fields and backgrounds. In fact, disability professionals reported higher rates of both explicit and implicit bias than the general population. Professionals with disabilities had lower rates of bias than their non-disabled colleagues. Professionals in leadership and administrative positions had higher rates of implicit/unconscious bias than people in other roles.



Though [contact](#) with people from minoritized backgrounds is vital in decreasing both explicit and implicit negative attitudes, the [nature and amount](#) of that contact matter very much. Interactions must include a level of cooperation and reciprocity. In the disability service field, the majority of those in "professional" or leadership roles who do not have disabilities provide support to people who do, creating an imbalance in power that may unconsciously reinforce stereotypes about people with disabilities, especially when professionals have little contact with people with disabilities outside of their "helping" role.

## Combating Ableism

For much of the history of the United States, advances in [the right to care or support](#) for people with disabilities have been tied to restrictions of rights to autonomy, choice, and control. Disability professionals can take active steps to change that paradigm and [notice, name, and take steps to dismantle](#) ways in which systemic ableism shows up. Support providers play a large role in people with IDD's ability to access their rights to choice, control, dignity, and safety. Two of the strongest predictors of public attitudes towards people with disabilities are [education about and contact with](#) people with disabilities. Through shaping the context of support, infrastructure, and policies that influence inclusion, disability professionals play a large role in shaping public attitudes toward people with disabilities.

There is a long way to go. Ableist attitudes, especially unconscious ableist attitudes, are deeply entrenched in the collective psyche and have been stubborn to shift. A [researcher from Harvard University](#) found the implicit bias towards LGBTQIA+ individuals has improved by 64% over a 14-year period. Over the same amount of time, attitudes toward people with disabilities have shifted by only 3%. At that rate, it would take another 200 years to eliminate implicit bias toward people with disabilities.

Because many people who work within the disability service system will hold implicit and/or explicit bias towards people with disabilities, leaders must take active steps to better understand the size, scope, and impact of ableism and other forms of bias within their organizations and take active steps to resist and mitigate its impact. Some useful steps may include:

- Don't be fooled by the ["illusion of inclusion"](#) and promote policies, practices, and infrastructure that support the meaningful inclusion of people with IDD in the larger communities in which they live, learn, work, pray, and play. The [quality and quantity](#) of contact with people with IDD shape implicit and explicit bias. However, the [quality](#) of interactions marked by voluntariness, collaboration or reciprocity, and depth or intimacy of interactions has an even greater impact than just the amount of time people spend together.
- Support people with lived experience of IDD in meaningful leadership roles both in and out of disability fields. [Nothing About Us Without Us](#) is not just a slogan, but a guidepost for action.
- In spaces that shape the public understanding or knowledge about disability and people with disabilities lived experience, like conferences, congressional hearings, and publication catalogs, look to see whose voices are missing and take active steps to seek them out. [Across all nonprofits](#), only 6% of executive directors and 9% of board chairs have a disclosed disability. [Many nonprofit organizations](#) also fail to have board and executive leadership that represents the racial, ethnic, and economic background representative of the communities they serve. Funding entities may consider diversity and inclusive representation in the leadership of the organizations they support.
- Value and invest in the labor of [cultural brokers](#) to help bridge gaps between disability service organizations and the people and families from diverse backgrounds they serve.
- Explore and utilize [peer-support](#) models of leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

By recognizing the harmful ways that ableism can infiltrate even organizations with the best intentions, disability service providers can start actively working to combat ableism to better promote self-determination for people with disabilities.

*"All bodies are caught in the bindings of ability, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, sexuality, citizenship. We are powerful not despite the complexities of our identities, but because of them. Only universal, collective access can lead to universal, collective liberation."*

*-Sins Invalid*

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# Embedding Anti-Ableism in the Disability Service Industry: My Experiences as an Ethics and Mission Integration Director

*By Kasey Hodges*

- People most impacted by decisions must have a role in making them.
- Organizations have a duty to provide the people they support with the tools they need to thrive.
- Education and raising awareness about disability are important to have an inclusive environment.

A few years ago, the CEO of Arkansas Support Network (ASN), Syard Evans, proposed a unique role within the organization dedicated to aligning our programs, processes, and protocols with our mission and values. The desired candidate had to possess a disability and have a deep understanding of the nuances of the role from first-hand experience with ASN. With my history of cerebral palsy and more than two decades of involvement with ASN, I was a fitting choice. Once the role of Ethics and Mission Integration Director (EMID) was officially established, Evans entrusted me with the position.

In this position, I address diverse ethical questions, challenges, and concerns within our organization's dynamics. I have taken on initiatives in fostering an environment that rejects ableism in all its forms and champions equality and inclusivity at every turn. The following sections explore the steps and strategies I employ to embed anti-ableism into our organizational culture, creating an environment where everyone's contributions are valued, and their capacities are respected.

## Ensuring Representation at Leadership Levels

My primary responsibility as the EMID is to foster a culture of inclusiveness and equality within our organization. The pivotal role of leadership cannot be ignored when it comes to instilling anti-ableism internally. Reflecting on the [10 Principles of Disability Justice](#) posed by the advocacy group Sins Invalid and the quote "Nothing about us, without us" by the Disability Rights Movement, it is evident that those most affected by decisions, namely those with disabilities, should authentically and actively engage in guiding and directing our choices and actions.

One key mechanism through which my team and I enforce this principle is through our Advocate Advisory Council. Created in 2022, this council has been instrumental in ensuring that people who use our services at ASN have a prominent voice in directing the operations and decision-making processes of our organization. We have been able to gain first-hand insights into the challenges, needs, and expectations. Council members actively devise strategies and initiatives for what they aim to achieve based on their individual and collective priorities. These strategies range from staff training protocols to education resources for advocates and initiatives focused on fostering a deeper sense of community. The council is also responsible for evaluating their progress and adjusting their strategies accordingly. One particularly impactful project was the creation of videos concerning respect and disrespect. The videos were successful in raising awareness of the disrespect commonly faced by people with disabilities and how it makes them feel.



## Implementing Enabling Technology for Enhanced Accessibility

Another way ASN counters ableism is by being involved in the enabling technology movement. As the Director of Ethics and Mission Integration, I work closely with our Chief Wellness Officer, Lindsey Parker, to identify those who could greatly benefit from using technology. This step embodies our commitment to making individuals' surroundings more accessible, inclusive, and barrier-free, which is a fundamental principle of anti-ableism. We actively pursue avenues of obtaining the technology, unpack the technicalities, and ensure the technology fulfills its intended purpose.

We understand that technology can be a formidable force in dismantling barriers that people with disabilities face. Using it as a tool for inclusion helps in promoting the autonomy of individuals, making them active contributors rather than mere beneficiaries. Also, as technology bridges the gap between abilities, it challenges the idea of a single "normal" way of being in the world. People with disabilities are seen using technology in innovative ways, which can help dismantle stereotypes and promote a more inclusive view of ability.

Therefore, we are currently engaged in educating our staff on enabling technology through the program [Technology First SHIFT](#). This initiative provides our teams with knowledge of using technology as a resource in disability support, untangling their potential biases and unlearning fears. It strengthens their preparedness to work seamlessly with individuals with disabilities.

## Hosting a Podcast for Disability Inclusion Dialogue

Driving the success of anti-ableism in our organization would not be complete without facilitating an open dialogue about the challenges and strengths that inclusion brings. To ensure this, we have launched a dedicated podcast: "[Discussing Disability](#)." "Discussing Disability" is a platform where we unmask the reality of people with disabilities in society. Through this podcast, we aim to foster empathy and understanding while chipping away at negative stereotypes. The podcast features our CEO interviewing individuals we support, ASN employees, disability rights advocates, and other key figures working towards building an inclusive society. The lively and candid talks cover a broad range of topics, from relationships to vocational services, health and wellness, and more. Guests share stories of personal success, overcoming obstacles, and proven strategies for fostering inclusion and diversity.

We believe that by sharing these stories and resources through "Discussing Disability," we are creating awareness and inspiring change. Our goal is to empower every individual, irrespective of their abilities, to contribute to society and to challenge the norms that previously limited their potential. Overall, we want our podcast to catalyze making our organization and community more inclusive and accepting of all abilities.

Embedding disability strategies and making our organization more disability-inclusive is not only ethically right but also intrinsically tied to our mission of promoting equality, respect, and dignity for all.

**Kasey Hodges** is the Ethics and Mission Integration Director of Arkansas Support Network. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Hendrix College. Kasey advocates for equal opportunity, treatment, and access for herself and others with disabilities. Contact Kasey at [khodges@supports.org](mailto:khodges@supports.org).



# Combating Ableism in the Media and Faith Communities

*By Shelly Christensen and Ashley Nyaley*

- Disability affects people from all backgrounds and communities, regardless of race, religion, or any other identity. Despite how many people have disabilities, ableism greatly affects how disabled people are regarded.
- Authentically portraying people with disabilities in entertainment and news media positively affects how society views them.
- Participation in their chosen faith community ensures that people with disabilities can share their gifts and strengths, develop friendships, and diminish isolation by promoting a sense of belonging.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), approximately 61 million, or one in four adults, live with a disability. Disabilities affect people from all backgrounds and communities, regardless of race, religion, or other identity. Despite the prevalence of disability in society, individuals with disabilities are often treated with caution and stereotyped as helpless, pitiable, or inspiring individuals in the media.

The ways people with disabilities are portrayed in the media have a strong influence on how individuals are regarded and treated and often perpetrate ableism. *Ableism* is the discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities. Sometimes, ableism is unintentional and comes from well-intentioned people who approach disabled people as if they need to be saved or cured. Disabled people are regarded by what others believe they cannot do rather than what they can and want to do. Ableist attitudes also further feelings of isolation among people with disabilities. It places the burden on disabled individuals to adapt and conform to society rather than on the systems in place that are not inclusive of such a large part of the population. At [RespectAbility](#), our aim is to challenge the ableist mindset and infrastructure at the systemic level. We strive to bring about fundamental changes in how we interact and provide for disabled members of the community. To achieve this goal, we organize various actions, programs, and resources, including workshops, trainings, and web series, both virtually and in-person, to provide practical guidance and facilitate conversations surrounding inclusion. We also consider the intersectionality of various factors, such as race, sexual identity, faith, political ideologies, and more, to ensure that our efforts are as inclusive and comprehensive as possible.

One way RespectAbility promotes inclusion and representation is through its Entertainment and News Media advocacy pillar that promotes authentic, diverse, and inclusive portrayals across entertainment and news media. Since 2019, the [RespectAbility Entertainment Lab](#) has created an ecosystem of disabled creatives supporting each other by developing and elevating a community of disabled entertainment professionals working behind the scenes in television, film, and streaming. We also connect disabled creatives to studio executives and other decision-makers who will provide mentorship leading to higher employment rates among the talent pipeline of alumni. No one should have an excuse that they could not find a disabled writer, director, producer, or any other creative professional.

We implemented a two-fold program to combat ableism and perception in the media. First, we provide practical training to disabled talent both on and off the screen through our Entertainment Lab. The talent undergoes rigorous training with our studio partners in Los Angeles, CA, both virtually and in person. Second, we collaborate with studios to scrutinize their content, read scripts, and hire disabled

talent to ensure their stories are genuine and precise. By partnering with studios, production companies, writers' rooms, newsrooms, and independent filmmakers, we increase authentic off-screen and on-screen disability representation, effecting systemic change in how society views people with disabilities.

Another way RespectAbility combats ableism is through its [Faith Inclusion and Belonging](#) advocacy pillar that promotes the importance of faith communities and service providers to support inclusion and belonging by people with disabilities. Religion and spiritual community participation are key life domains for many disabled people. A [study](#) by Dr. Erik Carter revealed that 84% of people with disabilities say their faith is important to them, but only 45% of people with severe disabilities attend religious services once a month, and only 10% of faith communities do any kind of disability awareness.

Many people with disabilities want what others want from a faith community: to belong and have access to freely practice their faith.

Diverse religious traditions and communities are part of this growing movement to engage, support, and include disabled people and those who love them. RespectAbility's Faith Inclusion and Belonging advocacy pillar is dedicated to eliminating stigma and obstacles to participation in a person's chosen faith community. This is a multifaith approach to educate faith communities to embrace people with disabilities as members and provide access to all the services, programs, and opportunities that others are afforded. We provide comprehensive and personalized support to all faith communities to address the unique needs and challenges to eliminate ableism and advance disability inclusion. Our experienced professionals work closely with faith organizations to develop practical and effective plans that are tailored to each community's specific needs and goals. We believe that by working together, we can build a more inclusive and compassionate world for all.

Ableism cannot be eliminated overnight, as even people with disabilities may struggle with internalized ableism. However, we are committed to changing the stigma surrounding disabilities and dismantling the systems that create barriers for the disabled community.

**Shelly Christensen, MA, FAAIDD**, is the Senior Director of Faith Inclusion and Belonging at RespectAbility. Shelly is a pioneer in the Disability and Faith Inclusion movement. She is the author of ["From Longing to Belonging- A Practical Guide to Including People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions in Your Faith Community."](#) Shelly holds a Master of Arts degree in Developmental Disabilities from St. Mary's University of Minnesota and is a graduate of the National Leadership Institute on Developmental Disabilities. Contact Shelly at [shellyc@respectability.org](mailto:shellyc@respectability.org).



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# AUCD's YouTube Show "Tuesdays with Liz" Promotes Policy Understanding and Self-Advocacy

By Liz Weintraub,

Senior Advocacy Specialist with the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) and host of the YouTube show "Tuesdays with Liz: Disability Policy for All," answers questions about the YouTube show and her advocacy work.

- People with disabilities can do policy work if they can understand it.
- Putting things into plain language, breaking things down, and using pictures or videos are some ways to help people with disabilities do policy work.
- If we fight ableism with education about policy, people with disabilities can do great things as advocates and in their lives.

## What is "Tuesdays with Liz: Disability Policy for All"?

It's a YouTube show I do on a monthly basis where I put things out in plain language. I interview policymakers, researchers, families, or people with disabilities/self-advocates, but always with a focus on policy. We've been doing it since 2014.

## Why did you start "Tuesdays with Liz: Disability Policy for All"?

Policy was always in my blood. When I was 7 or 8 years old, I was at the family dinner table, and my family talked a lot about policy because my father was an editor of a local newspaper. I kept saying, "I don't understand this, I don't understand that," and my parents kept saying, "look it up." And that doesn't work for me. So, when I had the chance to make a YouTube show at AUCD (the Association of University Centers on Disabilities), I wanted my friends to be able to go up on Capitol Hill in Washington, or Dover in Delaware, or wherever to know what different acts were. Yes, I could ask people, and they do a wonderful job supporting me and my friends, but I want to do it myself. That's why this became a reality.



## How can policy work (contributing to policy development and implementation) be made more accessible to people with disabilities?

Plain language works, and so does breaking down ideas. For example, last week, I interviewed a senator, and I asked him, "What is appropriation?" because it's appropriation season. I made him sit down and explain it in a way that anyone can understand what appropriation is. To understand the ideas and explain them — it might mean drawing pictures, it might mean watching [Schoolhouse Rock!](#) Videos — but you just need to help people understand public policy.



## Why is it important that people with disabilities understand policy?

Because it's about us. I'm a U.S. citizen just as much as you are, so I have to understand policy. Everyone might not be interested at the level I am, where I watch the news every day and might drive my husband up the wall, but you just need to be interested. It's our lives.

**You have advocated for people with disabilities in many areas, including the criminal justice system, voting policy, and healthcare, to name a few. Which rights are you most interested in advancing right now?**



Employment and making sure people have fair wages and trying to advocate for transformative, integrated, and inclusive employment. People need a fair wage. It's not enough to pay me five cents an hour. I need to be paid at least the minimum wage. I deserve that. That's the least amount of money I deserve.

I also advocate for people living in the community and getting the support they need.

I advocate for an act called the [Autism CARES Act](#), which supports research about autism. There's new legislation in Congress called the [Marriage Equality for Disabled Adults Act](#) that gets rid of marriage-related social security limits. That's a really important act that says that people with disabilities can get married, just like anyone else. Some of our friends who are dependent on public benefits are not able to do that. The [Higher Education Opportunity Act](#) says people with disabilities can go to college just like everyone else. These are all important.

## How does "Tuesdays with Liz: Disability Policy for All" help combat ableism?

People can understand and go up to Capitol Hill and advocate for themselves instead of having to ask someone to help them advocate. If I can listen to "Tuesdays with Liz" to learn about what the ABLE Act is, or what the Home and Community Based Services Act is, then people will say, "Liz *can* do this or that." I don't have those letters behind my name, like a Ph.D. or M.D. or J.D., but I'm smart.

## How does ableism impact people with disabilities?

I think ableism is harmful. We need to figure out how to stop this because people with disabilities can do great things. People can own their own businesses. It might not look the same way as other people, but everyone is different. People with disabilities can do great things if you break things down. If you break it down for me and help me to understand and just believe in me. I've been fortunate to have people in my life who believe I can do this. When I wanted to be on the policy team at AUCD, my family thought it was funny because I don't have letters behind my name, and I don't understand about all of these things. But that's why I started *Tuesdays with Liz*. If people with disabilities understand, then they can go up to Capitol Hill to advocate for things. When I did a [written testimony](#) and the [cabinet hearing](#) testifying against Judge Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court, I talked about a ruling that he made when he was in the district court, and he said to these women with disabilities that they couldn't make medical decisions about their bodies; because they were living in an institution and labeled as "MR," then, of course, you don't need to listen to these women with disabilities. This case was hidden

from the media, so I testified about it. To this day, I believe sometimes people still don't often believe people with disabilities.

## What advice would you give to people WITHOUT disabilities about how to combat ableism?

Showing people that we can do things. When I was 17 or 18 years old, my parents asked me what I wanted to do, and I'm grateful because a lot of times, people aren't given that chance. But I said I wanted to be a lobbyist. I'm not sure why I said that because I'm not sure I understood what it was. But my parents acted like deer in headlights. They said to work in the library because that's what people with disabilities are supposed to do. Why would you ever want to be a lobbyist? And yes, I loved the library, and I did work there for seven years, and it was a wonderful job, but it's not what I wanted. My story shows that we can do this.

## What advice would you give to people WITH disabilities about how to advocate for themselves and combat ableism?

We can tell our story; we can go and testify. One of my friends worked in a sheltered workshop, and no one thought he could do anything. But the Maryland version of the bill ending the sub-minimum wage was named for him (the [Ken Capone Equal Employment Act](#)). He left the advocacy world to follow his dream, and now he's the owner of his own ice cream shop.

Just fight. Fight every single day. You can do this. Fight to be at that table. Fight to be on the Hill. Fight.

**Liz Weintraub** is a Senior Advocacy Specialist with the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) and host of the YouTube show "Tuesdays with Liz: Disability Policy for All." Liz has worked for the Council on Quality & Leadership, completed a fellowship with Senator Casey of Pennsylvania, and has served on President Obama's President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities and continues to serve on President Biden's President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities to advance policy on issues affecting the disability community. Contact Liz at [lweintraub@aucd.org](mailto:lweintraub@aucd.org).



# Creating Pathways to Justice for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Addressing Bias, Ensuring Accommodations, and Prioritizing Lived Experience

*By Leigh Ann McKingsley and Josh Branch*

- People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system as victims of crime and those living in prisons or jails.
- By law, people with IDD must be provided accommodations to be treated fairly and access to services and supports.
- “Pathways to Justice” is a community-based training program that establishes Disability Response Teams and educates police, attorneys, victim advocates, and others about IDD.
- When training criminal justice professionals, people with IDD are the most effective trainers and co-trainers who teach by sharing their own life experiences, expertise, and unique insight.
- “Just Policing” is a tolerance, anti-bias, and diversity training for police that explains disability, including voices from Black and LGBTQ+ communities.

In recent years, anti-bias police training has focused on issues of race equity, a topic of critical importance that demands immediate and continued attention. Another important group often invisible or overlooked when it comes to training police or other professionals in related fields are people with disabilities, specifically, those with intellectual and developmental disabilities or IDD.

People with IDD are overrepresented in both the U.S. criminal and juvenile justice systems. They face an elevated risk of entanglement in both systems and are considerably more vulnerable to mistreatment, bias, and discrimination. They require appropriate supports and services to have meaningful access to justice — supports and services that the current system either lacks entirely or does not make readily available, despite the existence of state and federal disability rights laws that mandate such accommodations. While strides have been made in improving the treatment of and accommodations provided to individuals with physical and sensory disabilities in the system, less progress has been made for people with cognitive disabilities, including people with IDD.

Compared to those without disabilities, people with IDD are more likely to be both [victims of crime](#) and [incarcerated in prison or jail](#). While people with IDD make up only two to three percent of the U.S. population, statistics from the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) found that 20 percent of prisoners and 30 percent of jail inmates reported having a cognitive disability, the most reported type of disability. This reality underscores the fact that criminal justice professionals will interact with people with disabilities throughout their careers. From a public safety lens, it’s concerning to the disability community because common interactions with officers can inadvertently escalate into potentially life-threatening situations. The concern is even greater if encounters include people with co-occurring disabilities, young people, or people of color, where the intersection of IDD and other identities or disabilities creates a greater risk of potentially violent encounters with police.

To address these critical concerns, in 2014, The Arc of the United States created the [National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability \(or N.C.C.J.D.\)](#), the first center of its kind within the IDD community that focuses exclusively on addressing the layered and complex issues facing people with IDD and their families regarding criminal justice involvement as either victims or suspects/defendants. N.C.C.J.D.'s mission is to pursue safety, fairness, and justice for all people with IDD, including autism, and serve as a bridge between the disability and criminal justice communities. The Center also serves as a clearinghouse for information and training on how to both identify and serve people with IDD as victims, witnesses, suspects, or offenders.

### **N.C.C.J.D. provides several programs and services, including:**

- Nationwide information and referral center
- Training and technical assistance for law enforcement, legal professionals, victim service providers, and others that build the system's capacity to serve people with IDD more equitably and effectively
- Publications and educational materials, such as resource sheets, white papers, and reports to promote identification and evaluation support of promising practices
- Opportunities to advocate on a broad range of topics (for example, developing police training, supporting sexual assault victims with IDD, and participating in surveys about healthcare transition needs for justice-involved youth)
- An online Community of Practice for chapters of The Arc that collaborate in real-time using the platform Mobilize, which also meets virtually monthly

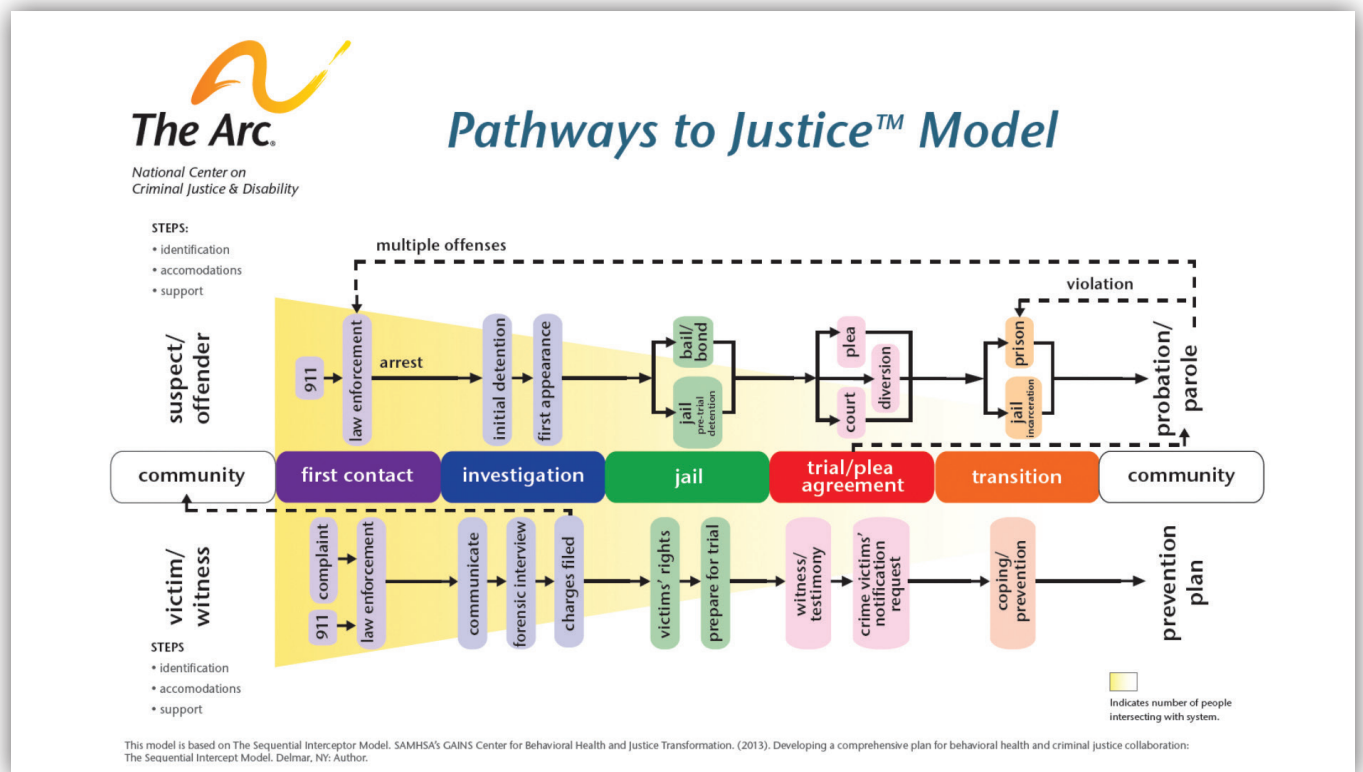
N.C.C.J.D. also works with The Arc's legal advocacy and public policy teams to ensure the rights of people with IDD in the criminal justice system are enforced in the courts and recognized and advanced in Congress and state legislatures. The legal advocacy team pursues strategic impact litigation on criminal justice issues, sometimes identifying plaintiffs through N.C.C.J.D., and participates as [amicus curiae](#) (friend of the court) on issues relevant to criminal justice and disability. The Arc's public policy team, with our state chapter network, advocates for criminal justice reform for people with IDD through the legislative process at both the state and federal levels.

In 2015, N.C.C.J.D. created the [Pathways to Justice \(Pathways\) training program](#) with funding from the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance to educate law enforcement, attorneys, and other criminal justice professionals about how to identify disability, communicate effectively, and use de-escalation techniques. The training was evaluated by an academic institution and received certification from Peace Officer's Standards and Training (or P.O.S.T) in various states throughout the country. Pathways is a comprehensive program for communities that are looking to work collaboratively to build long-term solutions working within [Disability Response Teams \(D.R.T.s\)](#) that proactively create plans to address and prevent crises before they occur. The community-based team brings together people with IDD, police, district attorneys, public defenders, judges, victim services, and disability allies to analyze where there are key issues and gaps in services.

Of utmost importance, and critical to the success of any training or reform initiative, is the inclusion of people with IDD from the beginning of the Disability Response Team's (DRT) creation. People with IDD are the single most effective group of people who can speak on these issues to the criminal justice community and must be provided adequate training, support, and opportunities to share their insights, experiences, and expertise.



People with IDD are excellent trainers, co-trainers, and panel members when educating police, attorneys, victim service professionals, and others. They must be given the appropriate training and opportunity to hone their skills as trainers or actors in case scenarios. By bringing community stakeholders together, Pathways works to make systems A.D.A. compliant and accessible to people with IDD. Importantly, Pathways strives to create a community of leaders focused on improving their systems not through one-off trainings but by sustainable change as the D.R.T.s select tailored goals specific to their community that N.C.C.J.D. provides technical assistance to see them accomplish. The Pathways to Justice model (see image below) is used with communities before, during, and after training to answer three key questions at each stage of the system as it relates to people with IDD: 1) Is IDD being considered or identified? 2) What accommodations are being used or provided, and 3) What type of supports are available to officers, such as local disability agencies?



So far, Pathways has been delivered for over eight years across 18 states. It has reached over 2,500 participants across various professions. In celebration of N.C.C.J.D.'s 10-year anniversary, we have embarked on a process of retooling Pathways to address current issues like intersectionality and unique issues pertaining to youth with IDD.

Since first launching the training, demand for training among police officers has only increased. In fact, it is N.C.C.J.D.'s single most common type of request for assistance. Training is certainly a starting point to educate community members on these issues. But what is sorely needed is system-wide analysis that considers how accessible local criminal justice systems are to people with IDD. Well-rounded programs like Pathways bring community members to the table for long-term sustainable changes that will make their communities safer for all citizens.

Recently, The Arc's N.C.C.J.D. began a new project partner funded by the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) to create [Just Policing: Disability Inclusion Training](#). The training collaborates with four chapters of The Arc (The Arc of Benton County in Oregon,

The Arc of New Mexico, The Arc of Indiana, and The Arc of Northern Virginia), which will work with their local police departments to offer both in-person training and virtual training through the COPS portal. This is another strategy N.C.C.J.D. is using to bring training directly to officers – providing it through law enforcement channels. The goal is to provide 5,000 frontline law enforcement officers with training and best practices on interacting with people with disabilities. Importantly, it will also connect police departments and sheriff’s offices with their local disability advocates, who can offer training, guidance, and ideas for connecting to community resources.

N.C.C.J.D.’s Just Policing training prioritizes tolerance, anti-bias, and diversity training for the law enforcement community through a disability and intersectional lens that includes people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals to support community policing. By doing so, Just Policing seeks to address ableism and other discriminatory barriers to support community policing strategies. The training aims to enhance law enforcement personnel’s involvement and commitment to community policing by helping them better understand the culture of the disability community, awareness of invisible disabilities, legal obligations, and bring to light real-life experiences of people with IDD who have other identities who are often marginalized in society. A person’s disability, race, gender, and sexuality are not described in silos, but instead, law enforcement will be trained on how those identities and cultural attributes can interact and influence a person’s approach and comfort with law enforcement. This initiative is building on earlier work between The Arc’s N.C.C.J.D. and COPS Office to apply [procedural justice](#) to interactions between officers and persons with disabilities. It also supports the ongoing work of the [COPS Office IDD Working Group](#).

When it comes to building pathways to justice for people with IDD, training alone will never be enough. Success comes when committed teams of diverse groups that include people with disabilities, criminal justice professionals, and disability advocates think long-term about what it will take to reform systems in their own communities. By prioritizing the need to address bias against people with IDD, ensuring accommodations will be offered throughout the system, and inviting and equipping people with IDD to be leaders in reform efforts, communities are effectively set up for success and can find common ground around a united vision.

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# Innovative Initiatives Q&A: Bridging Pathways: The I/DD Peer Mentorship Initiative

*An interview with Kelly Friedlander, CEO of Community Bridges, and Nills Skudra, Freelance Writer*

- The "Bridging Pathways: I/DD Peer Mentoring Initiative" (BPI) is an effort to grow peer mentoring in North Carolina.
- BPI uses peer-mentorship training led by people with disabilities, support, and paid internship experiences.
- Peer mentorship may be useful in fighting ableism because it expands the roles people with IDD have in society, allows people using disability-related health and human services to learn from people with similar lived experiences, and challenges the idea that people who use support services cannot be the "professionals" or "experts" of services.

## Can you describe Community Bridges and the work you do?

Community Bridges is an organization that specializes in connecting people, policies, and practices to create a more inclusive world for all, focusing on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Our work involves policy analysis, stakeholder engagement, technical assistance, and project management, primarily serving government, nonprofit, and private organizations dedicated to the rights and well-being of individuals with disabilities. My role involves leveraging my experience in advocacy, policy analysis, and program development to facilitate outreach, cross-agency collaboration, and strategic problem-solving.

## The organization recently started the Bridging Pathways Initiative. Can you describe the goals of the project?

The "Bridging Pathways: The I/DD Peer Mentoring Initiative" is a pioneering effort that offers a holistic approach to developing and growing the utilization of peer mentoring for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It comprises a comprehensive training program for peer mentors to develop leadership skills and paid internships for hands-on mentorship experience and professional growth. Program participants – mentors and internship hosts – contribute to a collaborative ecosystem promoting personal and professional development and community integration for people with IDD. It is more than just a program; it's a movement toward systemic change designed to forge connections between people, policies, and practices, ultimately reshaping the experience of those with IDD in North Carolina.





## Key Aspects of the Bridging Pathways Initiative are:

- **People** - Empowering Through Training: At its core, Bridging Pathways emphasizes the development and empowerment of individuals with IDD. It achieves this through comprehensive training programs, equipping them with the skills and confidence needed for personal growth and effective peer mentoring.
- **Policy** - Strengthening with Consultative Support & Evaluation: Policy forms the backbone of impactful change. Bridging Pathways offers specialized consultative support and rigorous policy evaluation to inform and shape future legislative and regulatory frameworks to support and uplift the IDD community.
- **Practice** - Enriching with Paid Internship Opportunities: Practical experience is crucial. Bridging Pathways offers paid internships and real-world experiences for participants to apply what they have learned. This also allows organizations to experiment with and demonstrate how peer mentors can improve the lives of those they support.

This is a collaborative initiative between the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, North Carolina's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Community Bridges.

## How is the Bridging Pathways peer mentorship initiative innovative?

What sets the Bridging Pathways initiative apart is its emphasis on leveraging the lived experiences of individuals with IDD to facilitate learning and growth. This initiative recognizes the unique value of peer support in fostering understanding, empathy, and practical skills. This approach acknowledges the power of shared experiences and the impact they can have on personal development and community integration. It's an approach that empowers mentees and reinforces the mentors' sense of purpose and community contribution.

## How did the idea for this project come to be?

The idea for the Bridging Pathways initiative emerged from a recognized need for more personalized, experience-based support for individuals with IDD. Traditional support systems often lack the depth of understanding and personal connection that can come from shared experiences. Recognizing this gap and inspired by the principle that individuals with IDD are best supported by those who truly understand their challenges, we sought to create a program that leverages the strengths and experiences of individuals with IDD themselves. The initiative was kickstarted by a collaborative effort among community members, advocates, and professionals who shared a vision for a more inclusive approach to support and empowerment.

## If this project reaches its goals, what will the impact be on the lives of people with disabilities and the community?

If this project reaches its goals, the impact on the lives of people with disabilities and the broader community will be profound. Individuals with IDD will gain greater confidence, autonomy, and an enhanced ability to advocate for themselves and others. The community will benefit from increased awareness and inclusion, breaking down barriers, and changing perceptions about the capabilities of people with IDD. Ultimately, this leads to a more inclusive society where everyone is valued for their contributions.



## What motivates people to participate in programs that support the development of peer mentors?

People with lived experience of intellectual and or developmental disabilities have shared a variety of reasons for wanting to serve as peer mentors and develop their peer mentorship skills. Most of the reasons are rooted in a desire to use their experience to make navigating services and life a little easier for people with similar backgrounds.

Among individuals who took part in an earlier iteration of what is now the Bridging Pathways Initiative, was William Watson. Diagnosed with various neuromuscular conditions, including polyneuropathy, William applied for the Peer Mentorship Training Program because of his belief in the importance of communication for people with disabilities. “With my challenges,” he noted, “I find a strong support system to be very vital for helping people navigate the system.” When asked about the biggest challenges that people with IDD face, he reflected, “The biggest challenges are that there are so many different avenues that can make it confusing to navigate. If I can help in any way to help somebody else speak more plainly, that is the main goal.”

Jade McWilliams, who also participated in the Peer Mentorship Training Program said, “People who have shared or similar life experiences often have special insight into each other; these insights can grow into friendships, resilience, networks of support, and more. I have seen this happen naturally within my own community many times. So, while there is real value already being created via peer-to-peer support, I’ve always wondered how to take it to the next level. What would a formal IDD peer mentoring curriculum look like? How would it make us better advocates for each other? And strengthen our communities? I want to know because I want to do this work! I’m excited to participate in this program and put the information to use in my community. I believe that we deserve it and that we can do it!”

Another participant said, “I also live with mental illness. This makes me an even better candidate because sometimes IDD and mood disorders can co-occur. I live with both of these and can better assist my peers in navigating the behavioral health system, making sure they have the right services and supports, empowering them to advocate for themselves.”

## Why do you think peer mentorship might be important in changing attitudes toward people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities?

Peer mentorship is critical in changing attitudes toward people with intellectual and developmental disabilities because it challenges prevailing stereotypes and highlights the competence and potential of individuals with IDD. By showcasing successful role models and fostering direct, meaningful interactions, peer mentorship can shift perceptions, promote empathy, and highlight the shared humanity that transcends differences. This approach empowers people with IDD and educates the broader community, leading to a more inclusive and understanding society.



**Kelly Friedlander** is the CEO of Community Bridges and has made significant strides in the IDD sector by being a crucial connector among key stakeholders. She has been instrumental in advising policymakers, enhancing program development, fostering collaborations across agencies, and encouraging individuals with disabilities to become leaders and advocates. Kelly began her career 18 years ago as a direct support professional. She holds master's degrees in Social Work and Public Administration and a bachelor's degree in Social Work. She is also a graduate of the Leadership Institute. Contact Kelly at [kelly@cb-cg.com](mailto:kelly@cb-cg.com).



**Nils Skudra** is a recent graduate of the Master's in Library and Information Sciences program at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, where he received a previous master's degree in History in 2018. Originally from Berkeley, California, he moved to North Carolina in 2016 for graduate studies in Civil War history, a subject that has been his lifelong passion. Nils has written numerous freelance articles relating to the Civil War, which have been published in various newspapers including The Roanoke Times and the Greensboro News and Record. He aspires to work as a full-time professional historian or librarian, and he enjoys visiting different Civil War landmarks across North Carolina and Virginia. Contact Nils at [nilsskudra@gmail.com](mailto:nilsskudra@gmail.com).



# Applying Reflexive Practices to Promote Organizational Accountability of Ableism

By Cory Gilden

- Some types of ableism are not intentional and come from attitudes and beliefs that we might not know we have, called “implicit bias.”
- People who work to support people with disabilities might have implicit bias against people with disabilities.
- People who work to support people with disabilities can fight their implicit bias by learning more about it and by including people with disabilities in decision making.

## What Does the Research Say?

Like all the other “-isms” in society, ableism has deep roots that can show up in many ways, like stereotypes, prejudices, microaggressions, and blatant discrimination. Ableism tends to show up in [more subtle ways in the workplace](#), such as an inappropriate or thoughtless use of space (e.g., inaccessible restroom stalls, limited elevators, etc.), using insensitive language (e.g., calling someone “psycho” or “spaz” or asking people how or why they are disabled), making assumptions (e.g., thinking someone is not smart because they have a learning disability or thinking that someone is lazy or unfocused because they have a less-visible disability), using demeaning communication (e.g., using an overly “nice” voice or speaking about people with disabilities as being “[inspirational](#)”), and being invasive (e.g., pushing someone’s wheelchair without being asked or finishing someone’s sentences because they’re taking too long). Often, these forms of ableism stem from personal experiences and misconceptions that develop what’s known as [implicit bias](#), or unconscious attitudes toward a group of people. To combat ableism, it is important that professionals examine their implicit biases.



Qualitative researchers are encouraged to check their implicit bias by using a process called reflexivity. [“Reflexivity is the act of examining one’s own assumption, belief, and judgement systems, and thinking carefully and critically about how these influence the research process.”](#) Reflexivity involves acknowledging and centering your position on the topic you are studying. A researcher’s background, experiences, and judgment go into their perspectives of what they are researching and why, as well as their interpretation of their findings. Reflexivity promotes an active recognition of how the researcher’s conscious and unconscious viewpoint may influence the research. Reflexivity calls on the researcher to stop and turn inward, a practice that professionals in the disability field would also greatly benefit from as a first step to be proactive in confronting ableism.



## What Does It Mean for Our Field?

Just because someone works in the disability field does not mean that they do not have bias against people with disabilities. In fact, in a [recent study](#), an alarming 77.24% of disability professionals preferred nondisabled people explicitly (consciously) and 82.03% implicitly (unconsciously). It is critical that disability professionals uncover and examine the unconscious beliefs that drive their actions so they do not limit the possibilities of the people with disabilities they support. It is not easy to challenge our worldviews that have been groomed by culture, society, and personal experiences throughout our lives, but this reflection is a crucial first step in making progress toward anti-ableism. Many sources encourage people to start checking their bias by asking themselves thought-provoking questions. For example, some of the questions suggested by sources from [Penn State](#) and the [American Bar Association](#) include:

- Do you think “disabled” is a negative word? If so, which words should be used instead?
- When you see someone with a disability, do you automatically want to help them?
- Do you view people with intellectual disabilities or developmental disabilities as being: dependent on others to care for them? Vulnerable? Kind and generous? Innocent and sweet-natured?

Just as examining bias at an individual level is important, frequent examinations should also be done at the organizational level by reviewing how the language, policies, and practices convey the organization’s values. Language reflects historical, social, individual, and group-based attitudes and can contribute greatly to “[othering](#),” or defining who does or does not belong to a group, which can promote prejudice and the devaluing of a group. For example, using terms like “client,” “individual,” or “our friend” for a person with disabilities, while seemingly more respectful than previous terms used in the disability field, creates a division between types of people. Similarly, policies and procedures, from hiring practices to how meetings operate, should be reviewed for unintentional bias.

## What Does It Mean for Me?

Take an internal to external approach to revealing ableism in you and your organization. Start by considering your own implicit bias and intentionally encouraging everyone in your organization to do the same. Then, move outward to reviewing your organization’s policies and practices to find less obvious ableism and find ways to be more intentionally inclusive. Finally, consider ways your interactions, services, and organizational efforts can be improved to combat ableism with the people you support, their families, the communities they live in, and in society. Here are some methods of combating implicit bias in your organization:

**Check Your Bias:** Along with the questions referred to earlier, there are online quizzes designed to help draw out biases. The Washington Post has an [Are You Ableist?](#) quiz online. Or you can take the [Implicit Association Test](#) to measure your attitudes and beliefs. The American Bar Association has created [scenarios to help prompt discussions](#) about disability bias. Use these tools to expose bias, reflect on how it has influenced your judgment and behavior, and take accountability for any negative consequences that resulted from your bias. Additionally, committing to practice approaches like [cultural humility](#) may help leaders develop clearer lenses for noticing the impact of ableism and other forms of prejudice and take steps to mitigate the harm. Cultural humility involves a commitment to life-long learning about oneself and others, engaging in critical self-reflection to become aware of one’s values, beliefs, and biases, taking steps to actively reduce power imbalances within relationships, and insisting upon “institutional accountability” by regularly auditing organizational policies and practices to check for potential harm. Remember to keep monitoring your potential personal bias often.



**Educate All Employees:** Initiate professional development and educational trainings focused on ableism and combating bias that can help raise awareness of how damaging ableism can be and how to consciously oppose it. Remember that “disability” is not a bad word and that there is no shame in having a disability. Be sure to incorporate talking and listening directly to people with disabilities about what it means and does not mean to have a disability as part of the training process.

**Challenge Each Other:** It is often easier to spot someone else’s bias than your own. Once everyone is aware of potential bias against people with disabilities that can contribute to ableism, keep each other in check by creating a supportive environment. It is easy to become defensive when someone points out your bias; the [Harvard Business Review](#) suggests these phrases to switch your mindset from defensiveness to curiosity and positive intent:

- “I really appreciate you sharing that with me. What else did you notice that I should be aware of?”
- “I hadn’t thought about it this way until you shared your views. Would you say more?”
- “Thank you. I didn’t realize that. I’m committed to growing my leadership and am aware we all have unconscious biases. What else can you share with me about the impact of my actions?”

**Review Policies and Practices:** Organizations should conduct periodic reviews of their policies and practices to ensure they reflect organizational values. For example, equity policies should be clearly stated, and the language used throughout written materials like employee handbooks and marketing materials should be inclusive and aligned with organizational values. Ensure all diversity, equity, and inclusion work of your organization includes and centers [accessibility](#).

**Prioritize Inclusivity and Representation:** [Exposure to disability](#) and engaging with people with disabilities (i.e., engaging in positive experiences and relationships) can combat ableism by building positive associations and reducing stereotyping. Organizations can help [center disabled voices](#) by promoting diversity during hiring and ensuring people with disabilities are on boards and committees and part of decision-making processes. This may mean investing in [infrastructure, training, and support](#) to help disabled people with various support needs succeed within leadership roles. Also, when using [data](#) to inform decision-making about your organization, ensure that people with disabilities play a role in shaping what is measured, how it is measured, and how the data is interpreted. Incorporating people with disabilities into the organization is not only best practice, but it may help reduce the bias of other professionals by creating common ground and where the focus is on commonalities rather than differences. Additionally, positive disability-related identity and the community it creates can lead to are [protective](#) against shame and stigma.

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# Amplifying Voices with Lived Experience to Combat Ableism

While it is important to highlight the work of organizations in the field that are leading anti-ableist efforts, it is even more important to make sure the voices of people with disabilities are being heard about the impact of ableism and how to approach it. Below are some articles and blogs published in other publications that contribute valuable lived experiences and firsthand perspectives to the topic of ableism.

- **Christine vs. Work: What You Need to Know About Ableism at Work**  
*by Christine Liu and Lydia XZ Brown*  
<https://hbr.org/2022/08/christine-vs-work-what-you-need-to-know-about-ableism-at-work>
- **From Ableist to Self Advocate**  
*by Amy Sequenzia*  
<https://awnnetwork.org/from-ableist-to-self-advocate/>
- **Why Disability Justice is a Way of Life**  
*by Lateef H. McLeod*  
<https://lateefhmcLeod.com/blog/entry/why-disability-justice-is-a-way-of-life/>
- **Bachelor, Self-Disclosure and Self-Advocacy**  
*by Dr. Neff*  
<https://neurodivergentinsights.com/mentalhealthresources/lets-talk-the-bachelor>
- **Ableism Hurts Everybody**  
*by ASAN newsletter contributors*  
<https://autisticadvocacy.org/2012/10/october-2012-newsletter/>
- **A Plain Language Guide About Ableism and Violence**  
*by Green Mountain Self-Advocates*  
<https://gmsavt.org/resources/a-plain-language-guide-about-ableism-violence>
- **Finding Myself in an Ableist World: The Advocacy Issue I Didn't Know I Needed to Fight For**  
*by Charis Hill*  
<https://www.childrenscancercause.org/blog/guest-blog-ableism>
- **Self-Advocacy and Invisible Disabilities, A Personal Perspective: Ableism and Ignorance Make Self-Advocacy Hard**  
*by Jennifer Sarche*  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pain-is-personal/202302/self-advocacy-and-invisible-disability>

# Useful Tools and Resources to Help Understand, Resist, and Address Ableism

By Amanda Rich

Ableism will take time and effort to change. There are tools and resources to help leaders:

- Understand what ableism is and its impact
- Learn to notice and address bias in themselves and their organization
- Better develop, include, and support inclusive leadership

Ableism in our society is deeply rooted and will take time and effort to change. The following resources are useful tools in helping you and those within your organization better understand the nature, impact, and scope of ableism, take strides to resist and mitigate the harm of ableism, and better support a pipeline of disabled and diverse leaders.

Resource	Published By	Types of Information				Description & Potential Uses
		Understanding Ableism	Addressing Ableism within Systems	Supporting Inclusive Leadership	Addressing Bias	
<a href="#">Anti-Oppression: Anti-Ableism</a>	Simmons University Library	X			X	This open access series of online modules contains articles and videos to help understand the nature and impact of ableism, help people with disabilities cope with the harm of ableism and help others recognize and interrupt personal bias.
<a href="#">Deconstructing Racism and Ableism in the School-to-Prison Pipeline</a>	Institute on Disabilities Temple University	X	X			This open access series of online modules describes the role of ableism and racism in the school-to-prison pipeline and strategies leaders can use to support systems change to disrupt it.
<a href="#">Ableism and The Criminal Justice System</a>	Institute on Disabilities Temple University	X	X			This site provides important information about ableism and the criminal justice system. Additionally, it provides information on working with people with disabilities involved in the justice system as victims and defendants.

Resource	Published By	Types of Information				Description & Potential Uses
		Understanding Ableism	Addressing Ableism within Systems	Supporting Inclusive Leadership	Addressing Bias	
<a href="#">Accessibility Resources</a>	Autistic Self-Advocacy Network			X		ASAN provides practical information on improving accessibility of meetings and committees
<a href="#">A Roadmap to inclusive Leadership Representation (Key no8)</a>	Denis Boudreau on LinkedIn		X	X		This site provides practical information to supporting meaningful disabled leadership within organizations of all types.
<a href="#">Cultural Humility Resources</a>	University of California Berkely				X	This site links with many resources for supporting cultural humility at a personal and organizational level.
<a href="#">Many Disability Professionals Don't Understand Ableism</a>	The Council on Quality and Leadership	X				This site provides a brief summary of an important article on disability professionals' understanding of ableism. It will be a useful reference point for leaders working to better understand ableism within their organization.
<a href="#">Peer Support to Engage people with IDD in Research</a>	Research Lab, Temple University		X	X		This site provides information on using peer support models to engage people with IDD as researchers.
<a href="#">The Intersection Between Racism and Ableism</a>	Disability & Philanthropy Forum	X				This site provides useful information and links to work on the intersection of ableism with racism.
<a href="#">Implicit Biases &amp; People with Disabilities</a>	American Bar Association				X	This is an online tool to help identify implicit bias.

**Amanda J. Rich** is the owner and CEO of [Open Road Inclusive Community Consulting](#) and the managing editor of the *National Leadership Consortium Bulletin*. Amanda holds a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Sciences and is interested in the health and wellbeing of the human service workforce, trauma-informed and healing-centered practices, and disability justice. Contact Amanda at [hopenroadicc@gmail.com](mailto:hopenroadicc@gmail.com).





# What We're Reading, Viewing, and Listening To

## **Title: Resistance & Hope Anthology: Essays by Disabled People**

**Author/Editor:** Alice Wong & Disability Visibility Project (October 2018)

**Description:** In this anthology Disabled authors explore themes of hope, resistance, self & collective care, disability rights and disability justice. The book will change the way you think about leadership, advocacy and activism.

## **Title: Anti-Ableism: It Takes a TEAM**

**Author:** Helene Robinson (March 2022)

**Description:** In this brief talk Helene Robinson discusses how ableism is always political, how it has shown up in her life and provides ideas for ways we can create more inclusive classrooms, teams and communities.

## **Title: Personal Outcomes, Ableism, and More Featuring Carli Friedman**

**Author:** Cynthia Morraz, John Dickerson, Carli Friedman (February 22, 2024)

**Description:** In this compelling podcast episode Cynthia Morraz and John Dickerson interview Carli Friedman, Ph.D., the director of the Research for The Council on Quality and Leadership to discuss ablism, the Personal Outcome Measures®, and community inclusion.

## **Title: Demystifying Disability: What to Know, What to Say, and How to Be an Ally**

**Author:** Emily Landau (September 2021)

**Description:** This book was chosen by NPR as one of the best books of the year. It provides a practical and accessible guide to being an informed ally in helping dismantle ableism and making our communities more inclusive.

## **Title: Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice**

**Author:** Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (October 2018)

**Description:** Award winning writer and activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha shares a collection of essays that explore the politics of disability justice and the experience of multiply marginalized people. The book provides a tool kit for all who want to build accessible, resilient, and free communities for all.

## **Title: Discussing Disability**

**Description:** This podcast by Arkansas Support Network focuses on familiarizing the public with the daily lives of people with disabilities, including the successes and obstacles they face. Along with advocates, interviews also feature ASN employees and other professionals devoted to disability inclusion.

**Title: Policy Research Brief: Overrepresentation of People with IDD Moving Between Large State-Run Institutions and the Criminal Legal System**

**Editor:** Jon Neidorg (January 2023)

**Description:** This brief explains how people with disabilities are moving between institutions and the criminal legal system and provides policy recommendations for those at risk of system involvement.

**Title: Intellectual, Developmental, and Physical Disabilities in the U.S. Legal Settings – Perspectives from People with Relevant Experience**

**Authors:** Alina Palimaru, Allyson Gittens, Stephanie Brooks Holliday (November 2023)

**Description:** In this report, authors explore the experiences of people with a variety of disabilities as these individuals navigate the civil and criminal legal systems in the U.S.

**Title: Disability, Policing, and Punishment: An Intersectional Approach**

**Author:** Jamelia Morgan

**Description:** This article provides a contemporary intersectional analysis of race, gender, and disability – namely, the experiences of disabled people of color in the criminal legal system, with a particular focus on policing and punishment systems.

**Title: Meeting the Health Care Transition Needs of Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in the Juvenile Justice System**

**Authors:** Josh Branch, Leigh Anne McKingsley and Nikki Montgomery (2024)

**Description:** This report outlines recommendations based on findings from interviews and surveys related to health care transition needs of youth with IDD in detention. The recommendations support important system changes for youth with IDD involved in the criminal justice system.

# Upcoming Events

## The Leadership Institute

### Spring 2024

The **Spring Leadership Institute** will be held May 5th – 10th in-person in Minneapolis, MN at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. Applications are open now. [Click here for more information or to apply.](#) This Institute is open to all Disability Sector Leaders. If you are a leader with a disability, or a Direct Support Professional, you can apply for scholarship support to cover tuition and some travel and hotel costs!

### June 2024

The **June Reconnecting Session**, Maintaining Momentum: Strategies to Promote Wellbeing and Support Positive Change, will be held on June 26<sup>th</sup> in-person in Villanova, PA. This session is open to all Leadership Institute graduates. Join us for this one day, in-person session to connect with other recent graduates and to share strategies, challenges, and successes in maintaining or gaining momentum around change and to promote personal and team wellbeing. [Click here for more information or to register.](#)

### Summer 2024

The **Summer Leadership Institute** will be held July 14th – 19th in-person in Newark, DE. Applications are open now. [Click here for more information or to apply.](#) This Institute is open to all Disability Sector Leaders. If you are a leader who works for a state department of developmental disabilities within the United States, a leader with a disability, or a Direct Support Professional, you can apply for scholarship support to cover tuition and some travel and hotel costs!

### Colorado 2024

The **Colorado Leadership Institute** will be held September 8<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> in-person in Lakewood, CO. Applications are open now. [Click here for more information or to apply.](#) This Institute is open to Disability Sector Leaders located in Colorado. If you are a leader with a disability, or a Direct Support Professional, you can apply for scholarship support to cover tuition and some travel and hotel costs!

### Fall 2024

The **Fall Leadership Institute** will be held September 22nd – 27th in-person in Stockton, CA. Applications are open now. [Click here for more information or to apply.](#) This Institute is open to all Disability Sector Leaders. If you are a leader with a disability, or a Direct Support Professional, you can apply for scholarship support to cover tuition and some travel and hotel costs!



**Contact Us:** <https://natleadership.org/bulletin> • [bulletin@natleadership.org](mailto:bulletin@natleadership.org)

*If you have any trouble accessing the referenced material, please email Amanda J. Rich at [openroadicc@gmail.com](mailto:openroadicc@gmail.com).*