

Leading Across  
Identities

NATIONAL  
LEADERSHIP  
CONSORTIUM



ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

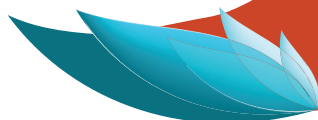
## About the Bulletin

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 NLCDD

### *Great Systems Start with Great Leaders*

Founded with an unwavering stance on social justice for people with IDD, NLCDD was created to ensure emerging and established field leaders have the skills, knowledge, connections, and resources they need to create a world where people with disabilities are fully included and have control over every aspect of their lives. Our mission is to cultivate transformational leaders at every level of the intellectual and developmental disabilities field so people with disabilities can live with dignity, choice, and full human rights. NLCDD works to meet this mission through training and development programs for field leaders working at all levels of their organizations and systems, customized support designed to foster transformation and forward movement, and research and evaluation to keep leaders informed and up to date on evidence-based and innovative practices and strategies.



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# Table of Contents

Introduction: Leading Across Identities . . . . .	3
Implicit Bias in Health Care, at the Intersection of Disability and Race . . . . .	4
The Ripple Effects of Immigration Enforcement on the Disability Service Sector: Implications, Organizational Responses, and Leadership Strategies . . . . .	6
Improving Services for LGBTQ+ People with IDD: Lessons Learned from Research in Ohio . . . . .	11
Centering Inclusion in LGBTQIA+ Advocacy . . . . .	14
Centering Culture, Language, and Equity: Advancing Disability Justice in Latinx Communities . . . . .	18
Duct Tape and Motherhood: A Need for Inclusive Design . . . . .	20
Hope, Liberation, and Community: Activist Anita Cameron’s Vision for Disability Justice. . . . .	22
Every Body’s Stage: Intersecting Identities and the Art of CO_LAB Theater Group . . . . .	26
Supporting Intersecting Identities on the Frontlines . . . . .	29
Families, Parent Activism, and Disability Activism: A Look Into Research that Captures Complexities in Values and Priorities . . . . .	32
Disability Justice in Practice: Intersectional Organizations and Initiatives . . . . .	35
Practical Tools and Resources for Intersectional Disability Leadership . . . . .	39
What We’re Reading, Viewing, and Listening To . . . . .	41
Upcoming Events. . . . .	43

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## Introduction: Leading Across Identities

Disability is never experienced in isolation. Race, gender, sexuality, language, immigration status, culture, and other identities shape how people with disabilities navigate systems, access supports, and encounter opportunity or exclusion. Intersecting identities influence how people are treated within systems and how they experience their lives. When we fail to understand this complexity, inequities persist. When we center it, we gain the clarity needed to confront barriers directly and do the work required to dismantle them.

Leading and acting with an intersectional lens enables us to build systems that are more responsive, more inclusive, and more grounded in people's real lives. This issue of the *Bulletin*, "Leading Intersecting Identities," invites us to reflect, listen, and rethink what leadership looks like when it fully honors the full identities of the people and communities we serve.

The articles in this issue explore intersectionality in the IDD service system across research, practice, lived experience, and leadership. Several articles examine how systems and biases shape outcomes, including Carli Friedman's research on implicit attitudes in healthcare and Amanda Rich's analysis of the ripple effects of immigration enforcement on disability services. Others focus on community-informed solutions and inclusive practices, such as Cory Gilden's pieces on improving services for LGBTQ+ people with IDD and her interview with Kayla Rodriguez about advancing inclusion within LGBTQIA+ advocacy, as well as Mariana Ortiz-Padilla's call to center culture and language in Latinx communities. Voices of lived experience and advocacy are highlighted through Laura Greene's exploration of parenting with a disability and Amanda Rich's interview with disability justice activist Anita Cameron, which grounds intersectionality in history, resistance, and hope. This issue also spotlights innovation and leadership in action in articles about the creative, identity-driven work of the CO\_LAB Theater Group and insights from frontline professionals participating in the LEAD program, who share what it means to support whole identities in everyday practice. This issue deepens this conversation through Allison Carey, Pamela Block, and Richard Scotch's exploration of the important and often complicated role parents and families have played across history in advancing disability rights. Finally, this issue offers practical tools and examples of organizations advancing disability justice, reinforcing that intersectional leadership is not just a concept, but a set of actions we can all take to build more inclusive and equitable communities.

Together, these articles issue a clear call to action for leaders in our field to lead with curiosity and accountability, while honoring the full complexity of the people and communities we serve. As ever, we hope you enjoy!

*Caitlin Bailey*

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# Implicit Bias in Health Care, at the Intersection of Disability and Race

By Carli Friedman

- Attitudes are the ideas we have about things, including groups of people. Implicit attitudes are attitudes we don't know we have.
- Many health care professionals have bad implicit attitudes. In this research, they had worse attitudes about Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) with and without disabilities. They had better attitudes about White people with and without disabilities.
- Intersecting attitudes are attitudes towards both disability and race together. Intersectional attitudes can impact how health care professionals think about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and how they work with them. This can result in people with IDD being treated unfairly, even though health care professionals might not realize it.

## What Does the Research Say?

Everyone has multiple identities. Some of those identities may be more important to us than others. Some of those identities may also make us the targets of discrimination more than others. There's also a growing recognition that the ways our identities overlap and combine – intersect – can also result in us experiencing unique forms of discrimination. For example, Kimberlé Crenshaw, the person who coined the term 'intersectionality,' [talks about](#) the ways Black women can experience discrimination that is different from what White women experience or Black men experience.

When it comes to people with disabilities, a lot of research has focused only on the disability-based discrimination people face, called ableism. However, people with disabilities, like all people, have multiple identities. In fact, throughout [history](#), the ways disability was thought about and people with disabilities were treated have been informed by race and racism. For example, when autism was first 'discovered,' medical professionals [believed](#) only White children could be autistic.

Health care professionals have long played a role in the ways that disability and race have been thought about, including beliefs and attitudes that have gone on to inform stereotypes and discrimination. Past [research](#) has also found that health care professionals' attitudes inform how they practice, impacting the quality of care they provide, and contributing to disparities. But there hasn't been a lot of research looking at health care professionals' intersecting attitudes, just attitudes towards one group at a time (e.g., people with disabilities, BIPOC, etc.).

For this reason, in [this study](#), I conducted research with 800 health care professionals to examine their implicit (unconscious) intersecting disability and race attitudes. The findings painted a different picture than previous research, which has only focused on disability or race separately. For example, while past [research](#) has found that a lot of health care professionals are implicitly biased against disability, in this new study, I found that health care professionals actually had better implicit attitudes about White people with disabilities than they did BIPOC with disabilities, or even BIPOC without disabilities. The study also found that health care professionals underestimated their biases a lot of the time, especially towards BIPOC with and without disabilities.



## What Does It Mean for Our Field?

The significant levels of implicit bias held by health care professionals, especially towards BIPOC with disabilities, have several implications for our field. Since health care professionals were frequently unaware of the full extent of their attitudes, they may also be unaware of the impact of their attitudes on their behaviors. In fact, in [another study](#), I found health care professionals with more bias against both White people with disabilities and BIPOC with disabilities were more likely to think people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) were difficult patients and to think they participated in ‘challenging’ behaviors. Being more biased against BIPOC with disabilities was also associated with believing people with IDD have a worse quality of life. As a result, health care professionals’ intersectional attitudes can inform how they interact with, serve, and support people with IDD, either contributing to inequities, when attitudes are negative, or helping promote outcomes, when attitudes are positive.

## What Can I Do?

Theories on how implicit attitudes work believe that we all take in – internalize – ideas from society. These ideas then inform how our brains process information. Since part of what we internalize includes stereotypes and biased ideas about groups of people, this means that most of us have implicit bias. While the fact that most of us have implicit bias is problematic, acknowledging that you probably have biases you aren’t even aware of is a very helpful starting point to improve your attitudes.

As a matter of fact, while it can be very difficult to change our implicit attitudes, [research](#) suggests that we’ll be more successful if we’re less defensive. When we’re defensive, we are more resistant to change and are more likely to justify our attitudes as not biased and come up with excuses, even in our own heads. However, if we’re [empowered](#), as we begin learning more, we’ll be more successful in changing our attitudes long-term.

A great starting point is to take steps to learn more about how implicit attitudes work and about intersectionality. For example, [DisCrit](#) is an approach that focuses on the intersection of disability and race, and the impact of ableism and racism on people. Armed with this knowledge, we can begin practicing breaking our habits and thought patterns that might otherwise be automatic. This type of critical reflection, as well as working towards social change, such as through [disability justice](#), can [improve our attitudes](#) and help reduce bias.

To learn more about implicit bias and this research, visit:

<https://www.c-q-l.org/resources/articles/explicit-and-implicit-disability-attitudes-of-social-service-professionals/>

<https://www.c-q-l.org/resources/articles/unconscious-bias-implicit-attitudes-and-what-they-mean/>

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# The Ripple Effects of Immigration Enforcement on the Disability Service Sector: Implications, Organizational Responses, and Leadership Strategies

By Amanda Rich

- Immigration enforcement can make families afraid to use services, leading to missed appointments, less participation, and disrupted supports for people with disabilities.
- Fear, detention, and uncertainty can cause stress, anxiety, and trauma, especially for children and people with disabilities who may need consistent routines and support.
- Disability service organizations are affected too, with staff shortages, reduced family engagement, and challenges maintaining trust in communities.
- Some organizations are responding by building trust, protecting confidentiality, offering flexible services, and using trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches.

## Introduction



Current policy decisions have made immigration status and nationality an increasingly important element of identity. Across the United States, increased immigration enforcement activity, including workplace raids, detentions, and heightened surveillance, has had far-reaching impacts beyond immigration systems themselves. These impacts are increasingly visible in the developmental disability service sector, where providers, families, and the workforce are deeply embedded in immigrant communities.

Disability service organizations are often trusted community anchors. When fear and instability increase in the broader environment, the effects show quickly in service access, community and family engagement, workforce stability, and overall wellbeing. Understanding these dynamics and responding proactively is now a critical leadership skill.

## The Impact on Individuals and Families with Disabilities

### *Heightened Fear and Reduced Service Access*

Immigration enforcement creates a climate of fear that can deter individuals and families from accessing essential services. Research shows that enforcement activity leads people to avoid [healthcare](#), [education](#), and [social services](#), even when they are eligible, due to fear of detection or detention.

For families supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), this can mean missed medical or therapeutic appointments, reduced participation in day programs or community services, and withdrawal from school-based or early intervention supports.

These disruptions can have cascading developmental consequences, particularly for children and people requiring consistent, routine-based supports.

## **Trauma, Toxic Stress, and Mental Health Impacts**

The psychological toll of immigration enforcement is profound. [Studies](#) show that exposure to detention or deportation directly or indirectly is associated with significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. Children in [mixed-status families](#) often experience chronic fear and uncertainty, which can negatively affect emotional development and learning.

Immigration raids and enforcement actions are increasingly understood as adverse experiences that can lead to toxic stress, impacting brain development, and long-term health outcomes.

For people with disabilities, particularly those with behavioral health needs or communication differences, these stressors may intensify support needs, increase behavioral or emotional regulation challenges, and disrupt progress toward individualized goals. In a statement from the Board of [The Arc of California](#), leaders shared, “These tactics are particularly devastating for people with disabilities, who rely on stable routines, trusted relationships, and consistent access to care. When a parent, caregiver, or support staff is detained or deported, the consequences are immediate: care is interrupted, trauma is inflicted, and access to services is lost.”

## **Intersectional Vulnerability**

Disability and immigration status intersect in ways that compound risk. [Disabled immigrants and disabled people of color](#) face heightened exposure to enforcement, discrimination, and violence. Additionally, people with cognitive or mental health disabilities may face significant barriers navigating legal systems, increasing the risk of unjust outcomes in detention or deportation proceedings. Many disability service and advocacy organizations including [The Arc of California](#), [The Arc of Minnesota](#), the [Center on Disability](#), [Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund](#), [The Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#), [The American Psychological Association](#), [The American Medical Association](#) have issued statements in condemnation of enhanced ICE activity.

## **Impacts on the Developmental Disability Service System**

### **Workforce Instability**

In [Issue 15 of the Bulletin](#), Dr. Daniel Boamah discussed the vital role immigrants play in the disability support service workforce. The disability workforce, including Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), includes many immigrants from mixed-status families. Heightened enforcement can lead to increased absenteeism due to fear or family disruption, staff turnover or sudden loss of employees, and emotional strain and burnout among staff supporting affected communities.

Additionally, policy changes to legal immigration such as revoking [Temporary Proactive Status](#) result in staff legally working in the U.S. to lose their ability to do so. Given [existing workforce shortages](#), these disruptions can significantly impact service continuity.

### **Disruptions to Community Engagement**

Organizations may see:

- Lower family participation in planning meetings or trainings
- Reduced trust in systems perceived as connected to government entities
- Challenges conducting outreach in affected communities

These dynamics directly undermine core principles of person-centered planning, family engagement, and community inclusion.

## ***Ethical and Operational Tensions***

Providers may face difficult questions, such as: How do we respond if immigration enforcement appears near a service site? What are the immediate next steps if a person we support or their staff are taken while out in their communities? What information can or should be shared with authorities? How do we balance compliance, client and staff safety, and client confidentiality? As noted by Marian Frattarola-Saulino, Co-Founder and Executive Director of [Values Into Action](#) shared, “Rules are important, and organizations always want to stay in compliance, but it’s important to remember that rules only make sense in and are dependent on context, and context can change quickly.”

These situations require clear yet flexible policies, staff training, and values-based leadership.

## ***How Organizations Are Responding***

Across the country, disability service organizations are responding and proactively adapting in meaningful ways. Some of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and other past crises are being used to proactively prepare for the crises caused by enhanced ICE enforcement. Emerging strategies include:

### ***Creating Safe and Trusted Spaces***

- Reinforcing confidentiality policies
- Limiting unnecessary data collection on immigration status
- Clearly communicating that and how services are safe and accessible

Marian Frattarola-Saulino shared, "Where you have trust, you have a healthy organizational culture that allows organizations to be better prepared for whatever comes. People will still be fearful, but it allows us to better engage and demonstrate to people that we are there for them."

### ***Providing “Know Your Rights” Information***

- Partnering with legal aid organizations
- Offering workshops for families and staff
- Sharing plain-language materials in multiple languages

### ***Safety Plan for Crisis Moments***

- Identify and plan for possible “bad” or “worst case” scenarios.
- Develop protocols for what should happen if a client or staff encounters or is detained by ICE.

### ***Adapting Service Delivery***

- Offering virtual or home-based services when possible
- Increasing flexibility in scheduling, PTO, and attendance policies
- Listen to staff, clients, and families about what they need
- Meeting families where they are, both literally and figuratively
- Ensure your mission is to “always do right by the person and ensure they are fully engaged in decision making and planning that impacts them.” -Frattarola-Saulino

### ***Building Cross-Sector Partnerships***

- Collaborating with immigrant-serving organizations, schools, and community groups
- Participating in rapid response networks to support families during enforcement events

These approaches reflect a broader shift toward trauma-informed, community-centered practice.

## Leadership Strategies for Navigating and Meeting This Moment

For leaders in the DD service sector, responding effectively requires both practical action and values-driven clarity.

### ① *Lead with a Trauma-Informed Lens*

Recognize that immigration enforcement creates chronic stress and uncertainty. [Embed trauma-informed principles](#) into organizational culture. These principles include: **1) Safety; 2) Trustworthiness, 3) Voice, Choice & Control; 4) Collaboration and Mutual Support; 5) Empowerment, and 6) Cultural Humility.** This applies to both the people supported and the workforce.

### ② *Strengthen Communication and Trust*

Proactively communicate with families and staff:

- What your organization does (and does not) share with authorities
- How confidentiality is protected
- What supports are available
- How the organization approaches safety planning

Consistency and transparency are key to maintaining trust.

### ③ *Develop Clear Policies and Protocols*

Ensure your organization has guidance on:

- Responding to immigration enforcement presence
- Protecting client information
- Supporting staff during crises

Train staff regularly so they feel prepared, not panicked.

### ④ *Support Your Workforce Holistically*

Staff may be directly or indirectly impacted by enforcement. Consider:

- Offering mental health supports or employee assistance programs
- Provide support or connections to legal services when needed
- Providing flexible scheduling during times of crisis
- Creating space for reflection and peer support

A regulated, supported workforce is essential for quality care.

### ⑤ *Invest in Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness*

Language access and cultural humility are not optional—they are essential:

- Provide materials in multiple languages
- Hire and support bilingual staff
- Engage cultural brokers or community leaders

These strategies improve both access and outcomes.

### ⑥ *Advocate and Collaborate*

Leaders can play an important role beyond their organizations:

- Advocate for policies that protect access to services and dignity for workers
- Collaborate with state agencies to clarify guidance
- Elevate the voices of individuals and families most affected

For many, changes in immigration enforcement and policy have made economically, socially, and politically hard times exponentially harder. Positive systems change may not happen quickly enough. Systems change requires ongoing and collective action. [Gary Haugen](#) once wrote, “The victims of injustice do not need our spasms of passion—they need our long obedience in the same direction—our legs and lungs of endurance. And we need sturdy stores of joy.”

## Conclusion

The disability support service sector is fundamentally about supporting and affirming human dignity. Leaders have a fundamental responsibility to prevent, respond to, and speak up when assaults on dignity occur. Immigration enforcement is not just an immigration issue; it is a community wellbeing issue, a public health issue, and increasingly, a disability services issue. The ripple effects touch individuals, families, staff, and entire service systems.

Disability service organizations are uniquely positioned to respond with compassion, flexibility, and leadership grounded in equity and inclusion. By centering trust, safety, and community partnership, leaders can work to ensure that all people, regardless of background, can safely access the supports they need to live, grow, and thrive.

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# Improving Services for LGBTQ+ People with IDD: Lessons Learned from Research in Ohio

By Cory Gilden

- NLCDD researchers worked with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more (LGBTQ+) people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD), family members, providers, and advocates to design a study to learn what makes it hard to get services, what helps, and what changes are needed so services are safer, more welcoming, and more supportive.
- Many people said service providers were not welcoming, did not understand LGBTQ+ needs, or made them feel uncomfortable being themselves. Their negative experiences with providers sometimes led people to stop using the services they needed.
- Organizations can take steps to help LGBTQ+ people with IDD have positive experiences with their supports, like training staff, using inclusive language, avoiding assumptions, showing visible support (like pride symbols), and making spaces accessible and welcoming.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more (LGBTQ+) people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) often experience stigma or discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, in addition to ableism and prejudice related to their disabilities. Data from the Human Rights Campaign indicate that [more than one-third of LGBTQ+ adults report having a disability](#), yet their experiences are rarely centered in disability research, policy, or practice. [A recent study led by the National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities \(NLCDD\)](#), funded by the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, explored how these intersecting identities shape service access, provider relationships, and support needs for LGBTQ+ people with IDD across Ohio.

## What Does the Research Say?

The study used a mixed-methods design, including a statewide survey of 122 participants and interviews with LGBTQ+ people with IDD and family members of LGBTQ+ people with IDD. An advisory committee of LGBTQ+ people with IDD, service providers, and advocates co-produced the project, ensuring that lived experience guided the research questions, interpretation, and recommendations.

[Findings show a clear and troubling pattern of exclusion, non-responsiveness, and service loss.](#) Fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents said that their LGBTQ+ identity makes it harder for them to find disability service providers that fit their needs. About one-in-three people surveyed experienced a lack of provider knowledge about LGBTQ+ needs, a lack of responsiveness to their needs, and a lack of allyship to the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, nearly half of respondents (45%) reported having a negative experience with a service provider that they believed was due to being LGBTQ+, and one-third of respondents (37%) said providers were not welcoming and did not make them feel comfortable being themselves.

These negative experiences and inhospitable care were enough to keep people away from services. About half (48%) of respondents stopped going to a provider because they did not feel comfortable because their services were not supportive or responsive to their LGBTQ+ identities.

Conversely, the study also revealed the protective role of natural supports. Friends and family consistently emerged as the most affirming and reliable sources of support, while professional supports were far more inconsistent.

## What Does It Mean for the Field?

This research confirms that when systems are not designed to recognize and respond to intersecting identities, LGBTQ+ people with IDD are more likely to experience harm, disengage from services, or go without support altogether. The findings call for a shift from individual accommodations to system-level responsibility for creating affirming, responsive, and inclusive services.

Several implications are especially relevant for disability field leaders:

- **Service disengagement is a systemic failure, not an individual one.**  
Nearly half of participants stopped using a provider because they did not feel safe or affirmed. This result is not due to one or two providers failing, but to widespread ignorance and incompetence that directly undermine health, stability, and community inclusion.
- **Cultural competence must include LGBTQ+ identities.**  
Lack of knowledge, allyship, or responsiveness is not a “soft skill” gap but a service quality issue.
- **Intersectionality must be operationalized.**  
Supporting people with IDD requires addressing how disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, income, geography, and other identities interact within service systems.
- **Co-production strengthens relevance and accountability.**  
The advisory committee model demonstrates how partnering with people with lived experience leads to more meaningful findings and actionable recommendations.



## What Does It Mean for Me and My Organization?

Participants described that providers who listen, respect identities, use correct names and pronouns, protect privacy, and intentionally signal that services are safe and affirming can contribute to a positive experience. For organizations and leaders, the study points to specific, achievable actions that can improve both service quality and trust with LGBTQ+ people with IDD:

- **Invest in targeted training.**  
Offer specialized training for service providers on LGBTQ+ identities, terminology, trauma-informed care, and best practices for inclusive support.
- **Use inclusive, respectful language everywhere.**  
Avoid prejudice or judgment in policies, materials, conversations, and documentation. Remove deadnames from files and ensure staff consistently use preferred names and pronouns.

To learn more about this study and the intersection of LGBTQIA+ and disability identities, check out the following resources.

OH Giving Voices Final Report

<https://www.natleadership.org/Reports/OHGivingVoicesFinalReport.pdf>

OH Giving Voices Final Plan Language Report

<https://www.natleadership.org/Reports/OHGivingVoicesFinalPlainLanguageReport.pdf>

OH Giving Voices Barriers Infographic

<https://www.natleadership.org/Reports/OHLGBTQ+BarriersInfographic.pdf>

- **Do not make assumptions.**  
Avoid assuming gender identity or sexual orientation during person-centered planning or service delivery. Ask only questions that are relevant to support needs.
- **Listen and affirm.**  
When people share their identity or sexuality, listen without judgment and respond in affirming, supportive ways.
- **Support the whole person.**  
Provide support that reflects who a person is, not just what services they receive.
- **Make inclusion visible.**  
Post pride flags or symbols of support to signal safe spaces and create welcoming environments.
- **Ensure physical and environmental accessibility.**  
Provide all-gender, accessible bathrooms and review spaces for both physical and cultural accessibility.

Organizational leaders should challenge themselves by repeatedly asking: *Is our organization structured in ways that allow people to be fully seen, respected, and supported?*

By intentionally addressing intersectionality, organizations and disability service systems can move closer to their core values of supporting people with IDD to live safely, independently, and with dignity.

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# Centering Inclusion in LGBTQIA+ Advocacy

*A Conversation with Kayla Rodriguez, by Cory Gilden*

- Kayla is a disability and LGBTQIA+ rights advocate.
- Many LGBTQIA+ spaces are not fully accessible or inclusive for people with disabilities, which can make people feel left out or like they don't belong.
- Kayla works to create more inclusive and accessible events and to educate others about autism and disability.
- Organizations should plan events with disabled people in mind from the start because real inclusion means making sure everyone feels welcomed and supported.

*When Kayla Rodriguez talks about community, she speaks with conviction. At 29 years old, Kayla is an experienced advocate at the intersection of disability and the LGBTQIA+ community. She is autistic, has ADHD and type 1 diabetes, and identifies as a demi-sexual lesbian who is partly non-binary, using she/they pronouns. We recently spoke with Kayla about her lived experience, which gives an important lens for professionals working across disability and social justice fields.*

## Kayla's Advocacy Journey

Kayla's advocacy began early. About 10 years ago, she attended a [Disability Day of Mourning](#) event with an Atlanta chapter of ASAN, where she connected with other autistic people. That experience opened the door to a network of peers and a future in advocacy work.

Since then, she has participated in training programs like the [Bobby Dodd Institute Ambassador Program](#), [LEND](#), and "[My Voice. My Participation. My Board.](#)" with Georgia State University Center for Leadership in Disability. She then became part of the [Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network \(AWN\)](#) five years ago, where she found a community that made her feel welcome and connected. Kayla is also an ambassador for [UnlockGA](#), leading advocacy efforts to promote HCBS across Georgia.

"It's been amazing being around autistic women and nonbinary people who really understand you and accept you as who you are," she says. "With this group, I really feel validated, seen, and heard. They had a total belief in me and what I could do."

The sense of belonging Kayla feels with AWN has not been her typical experience in broader LGBTQIA+ spaces, where ableism still surfaces in both obvious and subtle ways. For example, Kayla recalls hearing an ableist slur used casually by staff at a lesbian bar, an experience that underscored for her how much work remains.

"This was supposed to be an accepting community," she says. "And yet there's still ableism in it."

## An Overlooked Intersection

“I feel like the LGBTQIA+ community isn’t really inclusive of people with disabilities,” Kayla says. “At least in events, they don’t seem to be accessible to disabled people, or they haven’t thought about how disabled people can be involved at all.”

Kayla’s observation reflects a broader challenge within intersectional work: communities that advocate for inclusion can still unintentionally exclude. For example, many LGBTQIA+ events are hosted in bars or nightlife venues, which can pose multiple challenges for Kayla and others.

“Some of those bars might not have accessible ramps, so people who are wheelchair users can’t go into those spaces,” she explains. “And because they’re in bars, there’s alcohol and loud music. That’s hard for me as an autistic person because one of my sensory issues is loudness.”

These barriers send an implicit message about who belongs. “They assume everybody going to these events is able-bodied,” she says. “There’s a lack of consideration toward disabled people. They don’t seem to think about us and that we would be part of this community.”

Logistical disconnects can feel deeply personal. “I don’t feel like I belong in these events sometimes,” Kayla shares. “I’m trying to go to these events to find community and love, and I just feel like I don’t belong. I don’t want to feel that way anymore, and I can’t be the only one.”

## Building What’s Missing

Rather than stepping away, Kayla has chosen to build what she cannot find. Through her work with the Atlanta-based LGBTQIA+ advocacy nonprofit, [Southern Fried Queer Pride](#), she has helped organize events that center autism awareness and inclusion, also keeping in mind those who are multiply marginalized, including Black and Brown autistic people.

“I want to educate the public about what autism really is,” she says. “There’s so much misinformation. I want to let people know that autistic people are very much a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. I think they need to realize that and be more accessible and inclusive to all autistic people, and disabled people in general, in the LGBTQIA+ community.”

She is working to challenge assumptions with these events, not only about autism, but about who participates in queer spaces. She also says there’s a growing network of peers doing similar work, including neurodivergent LGBTQIA+ people of color who are creating affirming, accessible spaces of their own.

“I just try to spread the word as much as I can,” she says. “Hopefully, this event will be successful in educating people about what autism really is, and hopefully, more people in the community will be accepting toward autistic people and disabled people in general.”



## Designing for Inclusion

Kayla's experience lends some insights to professionals about how they can ensure that inclusion is intentional, not assumed.

"People should always assume that there's going to be at least one disabled person at an event," she says. "Disabled people are part of many different communities. Every community that is fighting for social justice should make sure to have disabled people in mind."

Kayla suggests simple but meaningful adjustments, like hosting events in accessible venues, offering sensory rooms, reducing excessive noise, and ensuring accessible restrooms. Also, people should consider social awareness and responsiveness.

"If we act different than what you expect, try to understand that we're disabled," she explains. "Instead of seeing it as inappropriate, see it as a misunderstanding. Help us feel included."

Event organizers and attendees alike play a role. Kayla suggests that hosts check in with participants who may be struggling, offer support in social situations, and actively facilitate connections, especially in environments where social interaction is central.

"A lot of these events, I feel like I'm left out," she says. "It's hard for me to meet people."

One persistent misconception Kayla encounters is the assumption that autistic people are uninterested in or incapable of romantic relationships.

"People think autistic people are asexual or aromantic or celibate, but we're not," she says. "Sure, some of us are, but a lot of us aren't. We want a romantic relationship, but we're more likely to have dating difficulties than other people. I just want people to be aware of that. We deserve love too."

## Advocacy Advice

"Something I've had to learn as an advocate over the past 10 years is how slow advocacy is. Especially right now, it seems like progress is made very, very slowly or not at all," Kayla says. But she urges people to remain committed to promoting change.

"It's not easy, but it's worth it," she says. "There are people who benefit from this work. There are disabled people who are part of the queer community, and they need this work to be done."

Kayla challenges organizations that hold inclusion as a core value to extend that value to people with disabilities.

"The LGBTQIA+ community is all about acceptance, right?" she says. "Then they should act like it. In a perfect world, they would fully embrace the message of 'the LGBTQIA+ community is accepting of people.' In a perfect world, they would actually be accepting of everyone, including people with disabilities."

Kayla wants professionals and volunteers working at the intersection of disability and queer advocacy to remember that true inclusion requires anticipating and assuming diversity.

"Remember that we exist," Kayla says. "Have our accommodations in mind. Just consider it."

And for disabled people navigating these spaces, Kayla offers encouragement from her own experience:

"Try to reach out and advocate for yourself. It's not easy, but it can benefit you and others. And you might meet some really great people."

**Kayla Rodriguez** is an advocate for disabled people, including those who are neurodivergent. She is part of the Autistic Women and Non-Binary Network (AWN). As a queer neurodivergent woman, she's passionate about sharing her experiences. Contact Kayla at [km.rodriguez1123@gmail.com](mailto:km.rodriguez1123@gmail.com).



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# Centering Culture, Language, and Equity: Advancing Disability Justice in Latinx Communities

*By Mariana Ortiz-Padilla*

- Latinx(e) people with disabilities face extra barriers like language differences, immigration related fears, and a lack of clear information about services.
- Programs work better when they respect people's culture, language, and lived experiences.
- Leaders can improve systems by listening to Latinx(e) communities and including them in decisions.

Equity in the disability community often falls short in the face of intersectionality. Across the United States, Latinx(e) people with disabilities face persistent and overlapping barriers rooted in language access, immigration status, cultural stigma, and systemic inequities in healthcare and social services. While the disability services field has made progress, many systems still fail to reflect and respect the lived realities of Latinx(e) families. The Latinx(e) Disability Association (LDA) works to close this gap by advancing community care and solutions that will allow for a higher quality of life that centers dignity and equity.

Latinx(e) communities are among the fastest-growing populations in the U.S., yet they remain significantly underserved in disability systems. In Georgia, the Latino community accounts for 12% of the metro Atlanta population, is the highest growing number of applicants for services, and still receives the least amount of resources. Latinx(e) children are less likely to be diagnosed early and miss out on important early intervention such as [Babies Can't Wait](#). Additionally, Latino children are [2.5 times](#) as likely to be uninsured than other children in the state. Families frequently encounter barriers when navigating systems such as Medicaid, Social Security, and Individualized Education Programs, particularly when information is not available in their preferred language. For immigrant families, there is a twofold layer when it is unclear to them whether their status prevents them from receiving services.

## Our Approach

The LDA was created to address these disparities through advocacy, education, and direct community engagement. Our mission is to empower Latinx(e) people with disabilities and their families by advocating for equitable access to resources, promoting inclusion, and fostering cultural and linguistic understanding within communities and institutions. What guides us is having both professional expertise and lived experience on our team so that we can have a holistic view on inclusion.

One of our most requested initiatives is disability benefits navigation. Through bilingual workshops and individualized support, LDA helps families understand complex systems such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, and NOW/COMP waivers. Our holiday toy drives and back-to-school events are some of the most rewarding, as we build trust with communities that are typically underserved. Parent support groups give parents a platform to vent frustration about systems while teaching each other new things. Sometimes the best thing we can do to build communities is simply give them the opportunity to feel seen.

LDA is also committed to leadership development within the Latinx(e) disability community. By creating opportunities for individuals with disabilities and their families to engage in advocacy, storytelling, and public speaking, LDA is helping redefine what a disability looks like. Some of our advocacy priorities include:

- **Criminal justice reform** — to reform practices that disproportionately impact Latinx(e) people with disabilities, advocating for training that focuses on de-escalating situations involving people with IDD, and the rights of those in immigration detention centers.
- **Affordable, accessible housing and transportation** — work with MARTA for more accessible public transportation, particularly in areas with high Latinx(e) populations, ensuring that buses, paratransit, and other services meet ADA standards and are available in Spanish.
- **Improving access to healthcare services** — push for increased funding for mental health programs that focus on the Latinx(e) community, many of whom may face trauma from immigration, family separation, and cultural isolation, all while managing disabilities.
- **Workforce development** — advocate for state funding for vocational rehabilitation and workforce development programs that address the needs of Latinx(e)s with disabilities.
- **Medicaid expansion** — increase access to Medicaid for those who have limited access to healthcare, and cover more people and increase the NOW/COMP waivers provided by the state.

This work empowers communities and strengthens broader efforts toward disability justice.

Coalition building is another key strategy we use to build networks of support. LDA collaborates with immigrant rights organizations, public health agencies, and disability advocacy groups to ensure Latinx(e) perspectives are included in policy discussions. This cross-sector approach acknowledges that disability intersects with multiple systems and that effective solutions must address these complexities.

## What Can Leaders in the Community Do to Support the Work?

This work advances when we have leaders who value the communities they serve and really live by “Nothing about us, without us.” Institutions and other nonprofit organizations should partner and invest in culturally and linguistically responsive programs that will improve outcomes. This looks like:

- Hiring bilingual staff
- Funding community-based organizations
- Ensuring language access is a priority, not an afterthought.

Advocacy efforts must also include immigrant and mixed-status families. There is a lot of misinformation that keeps families from applying for services because the parents are undocumented, but their child, who needs services, is not. There must be advocacy for systems that are accessible to all, regardless of language and immigration status.

The work of the Latinx(e) Disability Association demonstrates that meaningful change happens when services are rooted in trust, culture, and community. By amplifying the voices of underserved communities, the disability community gains new leaders and moves to an equitable and inclusive future.

**Mariana Ortiz-Padilla** is the Executive Director and Founder of the Latinx Disability Association. She holds a B.S. in Psychology, a Master of Public Administration, and is currently pursuing a J.D. She is an avid disability advocate pushing for equitable policy and uplifting underrepresented community voices. Contact Mariana at [mariana.ortiz-padilla@georgialda.org](mailto:mariana.ortiz-padilla@georgialda.org).



# Duct Tape and Motherhood: A Need for Inclusive Design

*By Laura Greene*

- Parenting with a disability often means navigating systems, tools, and environments that were not designed to be accessible, making everyday caregiving more difficult.
- Parents with disabilities face daily barriers like a lack of accessible baby equipment, limited healthcare support, and physical accessibility issues that can impact their independence.
- Despite many barriers, parents with disabilities show resilience and innovation.
- There is a need for better inclusive design, more research, and systems that support diverse experiences.

There are many ways identity shapes how we move through the world. For some people, those ways are rarely acknowledged, let alone understood. Parenting with a disability sits at one of those intersections. It is an experience shaped not only by caregiving, but by constant adaptation within a world that was not designed with you in mind.

My name is Laura Greene. I'm a 43-year-old, biracial woman with Spina Bifida who is a manual wheelchair user, and I'm the mother of an 8-year-old boy.

Difficulties started for me on day one, in the hospital right after delivery. The hospital bassinets were difficult to navigate physically for a parent with little to no lower extremity control.

Challenges continued when I brought my baby home, where everything hit the ceiling and life got real! Navigating bath time, tummy time, and hitting milestones on time became what life was all about. Daily struggles for typical parents could be aided with the right tools. But what do you do when the tools you have don't fit the parts you're working with?

A swing slides from under you. A floor is too low, and a bed is too high. A tub is too slippery, and a sink is too small. A crib is higher than your face. A car seat is too far. A door is too narrow. A playpen is too heavy. During the early years of my son's life, nothing made for babies seemed to be made for me.

As the days went on, I would MacGyver as many things as I could, several times over. I went through four baby tubs, three highchairs, three car seats, three strollers, four potties, three walker toys, two baby carriers, two playpens, and two ride-alongs because none of them fit our needs. Thank God this kid can walk now!

These struggles came in waves throughout my son's life. By the time I mastered one life stage, another came around the corner for me to level up my creativity skills.

Nothing was made for me. While some products were easier than others, they were all fairly difficult for me to use. No baby products on the market are made for a seated center of gravity. Along the way, I ran into some other moms in wheelchairs. They literally had the same problems I had when my son was smaller. Nothing exists for seated parents; we all just got by on duct tape, rope, a hope, and a prayer!



From this struggle came the idea that there needs to be a change in how baby products are made. I am currently looking for funding to innovate the design and manufacturing of baby products to create a more cohesive physical flow for parents in seated positions. Parents like me, who have experience overcoming barriers that seem invisible to most of the world, are perfectly prepared to contribute to this change. I hope I am able to find the support, knowledge, and funding to advance this latest evolution of mankind.

My eight years of parenthood have been a beautiful ride that has had its fair share of heartache along the way. From the touch of a stranger who thinks they are helping in a store, the paranoia that comes with a harmless lift by a kind passerby, the trauma of a kid who's grabbed out of the car by a distant, and unrecognizable, relative, while mom hasn't even turned off the car. All these situations, and many more, could be eliminated or alleviated for some parents with disabilities if inclusion were truly at the forefront of manufacturing when it comes to baby products. Imagine a baby swing that doesn't glide from under, a stroller you can attach to your wheelchair, or a baby tub at a secure height when seated. The possibilities of inclusive design for parents are endless if only we were at the table, or at least somewhere on the radar.

**Laura Greene** is a parent, advocate, and innovator dedicated to advancing accessibility and inclusion. She is passionate about designing and creating affordable, accessible baby products for parents with disabilities. Contact Laura at [LauraG6256@gmail.com](mailto:LauraG6256@gmail.com).



# Hope, Liberation, and Community: Activist Anita Cameron’s Vision for Disability Justice

*A conversation with Anita Cameron, by Amanda Rich*

Anita Cameron is an author and disability justice activist from Chicago, Illinois. We recently spoke with Anita to learn more about how intersectionality has impacted her life and her disability justice and civil rights advocacy work. This article is a shortened version of the interview with Anita; to read the full version, visit <https://natleadership.org/docs/HopeLiberationandCommunity.pdf>.

- Anita Cameron’s lifelong commitment to social justice grew out of her experiences as a Black disabled child during the Civil Rights era.
- Anita warns that current policies and rhetoric threaten the rights and safety of disabled people.
- Anita emphasizes the importance of disability justice and intersectionality within social movements.
- Anita finds hope in younger activists, community solidarity, and the resilience of past generations.

## Pathway into Advocacy and Activism

My name is Anita Cameron. I’m 60 years old and from Chicago, Illinois. I was born with multiple disabilities.

When I started school, disabled children did not yet have the legal right to an education. I was “mainstreamed” from preschool through university largely because I was identified as gifted. I’ve been reading since before the age of two, and by the time I was five, I was reading at what people described as a university level. But no one really knew what to do with a gifted disabled child.

Looking back, it’s likely I would have been diagnosed autistic today. But at that time, Black children, especially Black girls, were rarely diagnosed. I didn’t receive that diagnosis until I was 43.

I grew up on the South Side of Chicago during the Civil Rights era. On the street where I lived, the [Black Panthers](#) were active. Women from the Panthers ran a breakfast program that fed kids on our block. Programs like WIC later grew out of initiatives like that, though that history is often erased.

As a child, I read constantly about the Civil Rights Movement. I remember learning that thousands of people had gone to jail in the struggle for civil rights and feeling almost guilty that I had been born too late to participate. At nine years old, I made a promise to myself that I would do whatever I could to make the world a better place.

By the time I was 16, that commitment became clearer. I had left home, was attending university, and living with nuns. I became involved in a range of social justice movements — peace and anti-nuclear activism, anti-apartheid organizing, immigration justice, work with houseless communities, and LGBTQ liberation.

At 21, I joined a disability rights organization called [ADAPT](#). That moment changed the direction of my life. From that point forward, disability rights and justice became central to my activism.

## Current Priorities and Concerns

One thing many people don't realize is that disabled people in the United States still do not have a guaranteed civil right to live in the community with the services and supports we need.

Right now, I believe disabled people are facing a dangerous political climate. Dehumanizing language and rhetoric about disabled people are becoming more common. When people are repeatedly described as less valuable or less worthy of life, history shows how dangerous that can become.

For more than 25 years, I have worked with the organization [Not Dead Yet](#), which opposes assisted suicide and euthanasia laws. I believe these laws are discriminatory because they specifically target disabled people.

Supporters often frame assisted suicide as a matter of individual choice, especially for people who are terminally ill. But the reality is that many of the reasons people cite for wanting assisted suicide, fear of losing independence, feeling like a burden, lack of support services, are issues directly related to disability and the lack of adequate social supports.

Bias within the medical system is also a serious concern. Studies have shown that many physicians assume disabled people have a lower quality of life than non-disabled people. Those assumptions can shape medical decisions in troubling ways.

I've been part of disability rights activism for decades. I participated in demonstrations during the fight for the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#), including the [Capitol Crawl](#) and protests that led to arrests. In 2017, I was also arrested while protesting attempts to cut Medicaid.

When I think about the historical moment we're living in now, I often reflect on the fact that I was born before the Civil Rights Act was passed. Interracial marriage was still illegal in many states when I was a toddler. These struggles are not distant history for me — I lived through them.

Today, many disabled people feel that hard-won rights are once again under threat. In times like these, community becomes critical. We have to rely on each other — through solidarity, mutual aid, and collective organizing.



## Intersectionality and Disability Justice

For many years, the disability movement focused primarily on disability rights as a single issue. But [disability justice](#) requires a broader perspective.

Disability does not exist separately from race, gender, sexuality, or poverty. I am Black, queer, and disabled. Those identities are intertwined. Yet for much of my time in the disability movement, it often felt like I had to leave parts of myself behind — particularly my Blackness.

That changed for me in 2014 after the [killing of Michael Brown](#). At that point, I decided I would no longer separate my identities or my activism.

Disability justice emphasizes intersectionality, cross-movement collaboration, and the leadership of those most impacted by injustice. Disabled people are not a single, uniform group. We are people of many races, cultures, and economic backgrounds, and many of us experience multiple forms of discrimination.

For example, racism itself can contribute to disability through unequal healthcare, environmental hazards, and systemic inequality. Recognizing those connections is essential if we want to build a movement that truly represents all disabled people.

I've also seen situations where disability organizations resisted addressing issues like immigration detention, environmental justice, or police violence because they were seen as "not disability issues." But many of the people affected by those issues are disabled as well.

"True justice requires collaboration between movements. Disability justice encourages us to work alongside groups fighting for racial justice, economic justice, LGBTQ rights, and environmental protection."

## Liberation

Liberation must include everyone. There is no asterisk next to it.

If a liberation movement excludes disabled people, then it is not truly liberation. The same is true for any movement that leaves out marginalized groups.

Disability justice emphasizes what we call the *leadership of the most impacted*. People who experience the greatest harm from injustice should have a central role in shaping solutions.

As Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley once said, those closest to the pain should be closest to the power. When we center those voices, we ensure that no one is left behind.

## What Policymakers Need to Understand

Policymakers need to remember that behind every policy are real people with real lives.

Too often policy discussions become abstract. Decision-makers focus on numbers, budgets, or statistics and forget the human consequences of their choices.

Policymakers need to spend time in communities, speak directly with disabled people, and listen to those who are most often ignored — including people with intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, or those who communicate using assistive technology.

These are the people most likely to be affected by policy decisions, yet their voices are rarely heard in policy conversations.

## On "Allies"

I'm not a big fan of the word "ally." I prefer the term *accomplice*.

An ally might stand outside the jail and wave support. An accomplice is willing to be in the struggle alongside you, even if it means sharing risk.

Real solidarity means lifting up disabled voices, centering our experiences, and allowing us to tell our own stories.

## On Hope

Despite everything, I still find hope.

Young activists today are embracing disability justice and intersectionality in ways that earlier movements often did not. They are building connections across communities and refusing to accept exclusion.

I also draw strength from my ancestors. As a Black person, I think about the generations who endured unimaginable hardship yet still created joy, culture, and resilience.

When things feel overwhelming, I remind myself that those before us survived even more difficult times. That knowledge gives me strength.

I try not to stay in despair for long — maybe five or ten minutes — but then I look for something that reminds me why the fight matters.

Young people, community, creativity in activism, and the legacy of those who came before us — those are the things that give me hope that we will continue moving toward justice.

Civil rights aren't given. You have to fight to get them, then, fight to keep them.

**Anita Cameron** is a disability justice activist who has been involved in social change activism and community organizing for 44 years and was part of the historic Capitol Crawl fighting for passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Anita is Executive Director at [We Were There, Too](#), an historical, storytelling Project that is dedicated to preserving the overlooked stories of Black disabled activists in the disability rights movement. Contact Anita at [anitacameron007@gmail.com](mailto:anitacameron007@gmail.com).



**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 well-being of the human service workforce, trauma-informed and healing-centered practices, and disability justice. Contact Amanda at [openroadicc@gmail.com](mailto:openroadicc@gmail.com).



# Every Body's Stage: Intersecting Identities and the Art of CO\_LAB Theater Group

*By A.A. Brenner and Dewitt Burgess*

- CO\_LAB Theater Group makes original shows created and performed by actors with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The actors write and create every show together.
- When artists are the authors of their own work, who they are shows up in what they make. Their identities and experiences become part of the show itself.
- CO\_LAB welcomes artists who communicate in all kinds of ways, including through movement or AAC devices. CO\_LAB employs its experienced actors as paid professional performers, teaching artists, and community representatives.

One of the first things I learned about [CO\\_LAB Theater Group](#) after being approached to write the book and lyrics for its annual original Musical Theater Production in 2021 was its guiding principle: *All are welcome*. As a trans, Disabled playwright, I am constantly asking myself how I can welcome more people into my work: into the rehearsal room where it's made, onto the stage where it's performed, and into the audience where its impact lives. How can visual description and captioning become part of a play's design, instead of an afterthought? How do we ensure that the work itself reflects the full range of people who might experience it — through representation within the text, and through accessible practices baked into the experience of theater itself?

So, I was intrigued to see how CO\_LAB — founded in 2011 to create original theater by, for, alongside, and performed by artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) — approaches these same questions. I quickly discovered that CO\_LAB doesn't just welcome people with IDD through its doors: it builds its work entirely around them.

CO\_LAB's ensemble includes artists who communicate in a variety of ways — verbally, through AAC devices, and through movement and expression. There is no single "right" way to participate, perform, or be present. Which isn't just a policy: it's a structural reality, integral to how CO\_LAB makes theater.

And the way CO\_LAB makes theater is somewhat unconventional. When CO\_LAB decides to put on a show, the script doesn't exist yet. All of CO\_LAB's productions and showcases are original, devised works built in the room by the artists making them. Teaching Artists and volunteer Supporting Artists work alongside actors at a 2:1 ratio, ensuring each artist has the support they need — but the creative authorship itself? That belongs to the ensemble.

With the artists themselves as authors, inclusion becomes part of the material itself. CO\_LAB actors' experiences, humor, perspectives — and their full and complex identities — aren't accommodated by the work. They generate it.

I sat down with Dewitt Burgess, a CO\_LAB Actor and Leader who has been with the organization for 13 years, to talk about what that actually feels like from the inside.

Dewitt has been devising theater longer than he's been at CO\_LAB — he came in with experience — but he noted something about the process here is different. "I'm glad we [get to] just create something," he told me. "Take some ideas and mix them with others so we make our own version." What other theater companies produce, he noted, tends to be work "that's been done time and time again." CO\_LAB makes something nobody has seen before.

And that originality makes the work personal. When I asked Dewitt whether he ever finds himself putting his own identity into the characters he creates, he agreed. In *Strange! A Musical* — our 2024 Musical Theater Production, which I wrote the book for in collaboration with the ensemble — Dewitt played Raggy, a character loosely inspired by Shaggy from *Scooby-Doo*. "Raggy is like Shaggy from *Scooby-Doo*, but with a Dewitt twist," he said. He related to Raggy, he explained, because "we're laid back. He's a loyal friend. And he's a leader when his friends don't know what to do."

Thanks to the collaborative devising process, we were able to create a character who reflected who Dewitt really is — his relaxed nature, his loyalty, his leadership — and put it on stage. The "Dewitt twist" wasn't incidental: it was the whole point.

And Dewitt's authorship doesn't stop at his own character. For CO\_LAB's current production, *There Used to Be a Forest Here*, he's been collaborating directly with the show's composers on lyrics. When composer and lyricist David Lancelle and Patrick Thompson found themselves stuck on a song, Dewitt stepped in with an idea. The act of being able to directly collaborate with a lyricist is rare for an actor and is just one other example of how truly inclusive and expansive CO\_LAB's theater-making is.

"Every body belongs on stage. At CO\_LAB, that's not a tagline. It's how shows get made."

That's CO\_LAB in practice: a room where the boundaries between actor, writer, and collaborator dissolve, because the artists are the authors, and their full selves are always part of what gets made.

CO\_LAB's Leaders program extends this principle into the broader theater community. Leaders are seasoned CO\_LAB actors — Dewitt among them — employed by the organization to support classes, represent CO\_LAB publicly, co-facilitate professional development workshops, participate in collaborative hiring processes, and engage in long-term organizational planning. Through this work, CO\_LAB Leaders bring the organization's approach to schools, museums, and cultural institutions across New York City, advocating for accessible practices well beyond CO\_LAB's own walls.

Next fall, CO\_LAB launches its inaugural touring production, *The Sensational Senses*, bringing CO\_LAB actors into New York City schools serving students with IDD, expanding not only the organization's reach, but who gets to see themselves on a stage. And, for the first time, CO\_LAB will also be paying their actors as the professional performers they are.

*All are welcome* is CO\_LAB's guiding principle. But what that "welcome" actually means, at CO\_LAB, is structural. It's what happens when artists with IDD are given full creative authorship—when the ensemble doesn't just perform the work but makes it, from themselves, in all their complexity.

Every body belongs on stage. At CO\_LAB, that's not a tagline. It's how shows get made.



**Dewitt Burgess** (he/him) is a CO\_LAB Actor and Leader. He co-facilitates *Sharing the Stage*, CO\_LAB's professional development workshop for external organizations, and speaks publicly on CO\_LAB's behalf at schools, museums, and cultural institutions across New York City. Dewitt is passionate about expanding access to professional theater for artists with I/DD and bringing CO\_LAB's approach to new audiences and communities.



**A.A. Brenner** (he/they) is a playwright, dramaturg, screenwriter, and producer and the Development & Communications Manager at CO\_LAB Theater Group. He holds an MFA in Playwriting from Columbia University School of the Arts. A.A.'s work blends naturalistic dialogue with heightened realism to explore queer, trans, and Disabled experiences, and has been presented at La Jolla Playhouse, Lincoln Center, National Disability Theatre, and more. Contact A.A. at [aa.brenner@colabtheatergroup.com](mailto:aa.brenner@colabtheatergroup.com).



# Supporting Intersecting Identities on the Frontlines

## Stories from LEAD Participants, Collected by Cory Gilden

- Supporting people’s identities means listening to them, learning about their culture, beliefs, and interests, and helping them connect to communities, jobs, and activities that reflect who they are.
- Disability service staff say it’s important to create safe, welcoming spaces where people feel comfortable sharing who they are and what matters to them.
- Organizations can better support different identities by offering more training, celebrating different identities (not ignoring them), and making sure staff understand how to support the whole person.

*The NLCDD has been facilitating a program for frontline workers in Delaware, called [Leadership, Empowerment, Advancement & Development \(LEAD\)](#) training, for the past three years. Current participants of the LEAD program are DSPs, supervisors, coordinators, and managers at organizations across the state, including Easterseals, Forward Journey, Community Systems Inc., and Keystone Human Services. We asked recent participants of the program what they do (or what should be done) to acknowledge and support people’s intersecting identities in their work.*

“We are mindful of creating safe spaces and a welcoming environment so all people can feel comfortable expressing their identities and experiences. One way my organization does this is by providing comprehensive training for all team members on cultural competency that helps to foster understanding and sensitivity toward different backgrounds and identities. We work to engage diverse communities to gather insights and feedback on how best to incorporate the people we support. My organization also strives for diverse representation within its leadership and team members. To help people feel safe, we implement anonymous feedback systems that allow participants to report concerns or experiences of discrimination without fear of repercussions. We work to highlight and celebrate different cultural, religious, and social identities with our programming to help foster a space of belonging and respect among participants.”

***Ameenah Muhammad, Program Coordinator***





“My organization works with the families and the people we support to learn about what is important to them. I support one person who loves to go to church, so we take him to church functions. His family also supports him by transporting him to church functions. Staff should have more trainings about how to support peoples’ different identities.”

***Peris Kamau, Program Coordinator***

“I work as a Program Supervisor for group-supported employment and pre-vocational groups. We help people with disabilities connect with identities outside of their disability through jobs and volunteer opportunities out in the community. My team and organization help our participants become more independent and find the communities related to their different identities outside of their disability. We have pre-vocational lessons teaching different languages and learning about different cultures. We also do “Around the World” events where each class will decorate with different cultures and places around the world and share music and food for that location in order to celebrate different cultural identities. We are constantly gathering more resources for our participants so we can offer them more opportunities to grow and reach their goals and discover new ones.”



***Brianne Gray, Program Supervisor***

“It’s weird because I work in a field where we work really hard to be inclusive and want people to feel welcome, but sometimes we go a little too far. For example, my organization discourages celebrating religious holidays in our building because we don’t want people to feel singled out or excluded, but by doing that, we are not recognizing and celebrating the whole person and all of their identities. Instead, organizations should train employees and the people with disabilities we support to learn about other cultures and religions so we can help people feel understood, and we can learn how to help connect people to communities that are important to their identities. My goal is to promote inclusion on all levels of ‘disability,’ which includes celebrating and including all of my participants’ beliefs and practices.



***Martinique Dorsey, Program Supervisor***

“As a manager, I address and support people’s different identities by taking the time to listen, ask questions, and be respectful. For example, asking an open-ended question like, ‘How are you feeling today?’ can open up conversations for them to share things about their lives and identities. Our organization encourages person-centered planning, which is inclusive of a person’s support needs. Supporting people’s identities is very important as it makes them feel seen, respected, and understood. Service providers can do better by providing more trainings and partnering with organizations that can help create an environment for integration.”

**Brian Nyamu, Residential Manager**



“As a DSP, I help support people’s different identities by actively listening to the people I support. I work to incorporate this into their daily routines and activities on a day-to-day basis, but our organizations can work harder to support the identities of the people we provide services for. Even though we create personalized support plans for the people we support, our organization should train DSPs to do everything we can to listen to the people’s stories and understand their unique experiences. This kind of support is important to validate their feelings and self-esteem.”

**Jillian Oldham, DSP**



# Families, Parent Activism, and Disability Activism: A Look Into Research that Captures Complexities in Values and Priorities

By Allison C. Carey, Pamela Block, and Richard K. Scotch

- Parents of children with disabilities have played a major role in advancing disability rights and pushing for inclusion in areas like education, employment, and community living.
- Parents and disabled activists often work together, but they sometimes disagree. Disabled activists usually focus on independence and rights. Some parents may prioritize safety, care, or medical treatment.
- Culture, race, and identity shape family experiences with disability. Some communities face negative attitudes. People may have different views about disability, activism, and what support looks like.
- Families need better supports and stronger systems, so people with disabilities can have good lives without relying only on family support.

Parents of children with disabilities have played a foundational role in our progress towards disability rights. Using a range of strategies, such as lawsuits, lobbying, media awareness campaigns, and the creation of grassroots services, parents helped build today's infrastructure of community services and helped foster the paradigm shift from segregation to rights. That said, focusing only on the achievements of parent activism leaves part of the story untold. Parent activists have a complicated relationship with disability activism and disabled activists. In [\*Allies and Obstacles: Disability Activism and Parents of Children with Disabilities\*](#), we look at the collaborations *and* tensions between disability organizations led by parents and disability organizations led by disabled people through case studies. Detailed historical case studies of four different groups – people with intellectual disability, autism, psychiatric disabilities, and a broad range of physical disabilities – reveal very different levels of parent activism, collaboration with disabled activists, and key points of contestation between parents and disabled activists.

Looking at broad patterns, parents and disabled activists effectively collaborate on a range of issues, such as accessibility, inclusion, and nondiscrimination in public life. They also work together to advance education, employment, Medicaid funding, and expanded community-based services. However, disagreements do emerge. Grassroots organizations led by disabled activists tend to prioritize the empowerment of disabled people, inclusion and accessibility, and social reform. While many parents fully agree with these priorities, some parent organizations promote other goals, such as medical treatment and cure, the availability of disability-specific educational and service placements, and respect for parental authority in policy-making and guardianship.



*Allies and Obstacles: Disability Activism and Parents of Children with Disabilities* by Allison C. Carey, Pamela Block, Richard K. Scotch.  
Cover art by Jonas Lundström.

For example, the [Autistic Self-Advocacy Network \(ASAN\)](#), led by autistic activists, has sharply criticized [Autism Speaks](#), run by family members and professionals, for its focus on biomedical research and cure, stigmatizing imagery and language, and erasure of autistic perspectives. [The Arc](#) is often lauded for its focus on rights and inclusion; however, it also operates as a service provider and has been criticized for operating congregate programs like sheltered workshops and large-scale day programs. The political priorities of parents are infused with both the interests of their offspring (who may be a child or adult) and their own, and these interests may not align. Many parents face challenging choices and tough trade-offs. They may value the idea of rights but need or want services that provide a stable schedule, a safe environment, or a structure run by professionals. Sometimes, the only services like these that are available or that they know about are group-based and segregated. They may see these structures as more important and beneficial for their offspring than empowerment, community inclusion, or rights. They may even see the focus on rights as endangering their offspring, particularly when the systems seem inadequate to provide basic care and support. Thus, while both parents and disabled activists fight for “disability rights,” they may have very different ideas of what this idea means.

Building on these themes, the edited volume [Family and Disability Activism: Beyond Allies and Obstacles](#) features authors with diverse backgrounds – many of whom are from activist, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA2S+ communities – who share their own narratives of disability and family experiences in relation to activism. Across the chapters, the authors’ unique stories reveal how people of different backgrounds understand care and rights; confront systemic issues of segregation, institutionalization, and access to special education services depending on ethnic and racial identities; create narratives of rights versus justice; and experience tensions and connections between parents and disabled activists. Two examples are included in the text boxes below.

Across the nine rich chapters, the intersectional focus pushes forward our thinking on families and activism. They show, among many themes: the exclusion from White-centric disability organizations; the ways that racism, ableism, and other exclusions intertwine to present deep and persistent barriers; the failure of the current disability system to address the needs of marginalized communities; the harm of multi-generational trauma; the vibrant social justice traditions unique to different communities that inform their views and strategies in activism; and the development of alternative systems of mutual aid, where family may, for better or worse, play a central role in care.



Grace Tsao eloquently explains that disability stigma in Asian cultures may lead to family dynamics in which disabled family members may feel both deeply supported and stigmatized, a complex dynamic Tsao describes as “*beautiful, chaotic, and broken simultaneously.*” Beyond families, in seeking social justice, disabled Asian Americans navigate a complex terrain – a rich, but often overlooked, tradition of Asian American social justice activism and disability rights activism largely centered on Whiteness. Thus, Asian American families and disabled people experience intersecting systems of oppression as well as a social activism landscape in which organizations for Asian American justice and organizations for disability justice are distinct.

Lisette Torres addresses cross-generational experiences of disability as she explores how her mother's disability and broader Latinx identity influenced her own experience of disability. Torres' mother rejected disability identity and demanded to be seen as "normal." Torres, in contrast, chose to become a disability activist and cofounded the National Coalition for Latinx with Disabilities (CNLD). She describes her chapter as "*a deeply personal story of how I learned about disability by observing my mother's struggles with internalized ableism in relation to her progressive blindness and the stigma of disability in the Latino/a/x community.*" Torres, like Tsao, highlights the theme of cultural stigma. In addition, she explores the legacies we inherit and those we reject across generations and the opportunities and tensions created by those generational dynamics.

Families are diverse in their cultures, resources, needs, perspectives, and values. They form the earliest social support system for children with disabilities, yet parents may know little about disability apart from society's ableist messaging. Our research indicates the need to support parents and families so that they can, in turn, support their disabled family members, and to build a strong community infrastructure of rights and services so that the futures of people with disabilities do not rely wholly upon their families.

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# Disability Justice in Practice: Intersectional Organizations and Initiatives

By Amanda Rich

- **Disability justice looks at the whole person.** It recognizes that disability connects with other parts of people’s identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and income. Because of this, many disabled people face more than one kind of unfair discrimination, treatment, or barriers in their lives.
- **People most affected should help lead the work.** Disability justice believes that disabled people, especially those facing multiple barriers, should have leadership roles. Activists such as Patty Berne and groups like Sins Invalid have helped build a movement focused on community leadership, mutual support, and working together across social justice movements.
- **Many organizations are working toward disability justice.** The groups listed in this section focus on issues such as racial justice, LGBTQ+ inclusion, environmental justice, and welcoming faith communities. Together, they work to make communities more fair, accessible, and inclusive for disabled people.

[Disability justice](#) work is grounded in the understanding that disability does not exist in isolation from other aspects of identity. The concept of intersectionality, first articulated by legal scholar [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#), highlights how systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and heteronormativity intersect to shape people’s lived experiences. Within disability justice movements, this framework emphasizes that disabled people may simultaneously navigate multiple forms of marginalization based on race, gender identity, sexuality, immigration status, socioeconomic status, and culture. Recognizing these intersections helps advocates and organizations better understand the structural barriers faced by many disabled individuals and communities.

The disability justice framework, developed by activists including [Patty Berne](#) and colleagues in organizations such as [Sins Invalid](#), calls for leadership by those most impacted by intersecting systems of oppression. This approach moves beyond a single-issue focus on disability rights and instead centers collective liberation, community care, and cross-movement solidarity. The organizations and resources highlighted in this article reflect this broader vision, working across issues such as racial justice, gender equity, LGBTQ+ inclusion, environmental justice, and faith community engagement to advance more inclusive and equitable futures for disabled people and their communities. Disability professionals looking to expand their support of multiply-marginalized people with IDD should explore and possibly connect (and help those they support to connect) with these organizations, communities, or movements.



## **The Autistic People of Color Fund**

The Autistic People of Color Fund is a mutual aid initiative that redistributes financial resources directly to autistic people of color. The fund addresses the economic and systemic barriers many autistic BIPOC people face. It also raises awareness about intersectional inequities within autism services and advocacy spaces.

## **Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network**

The Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network (AWN) is a nonprofit organization that provides community, support, and resources for autistic people of marginalized genders, including women, nonbinary people, and transgender people. The organization promotes neurodiversity, disability justice, gender equity, and racial justice while working to challenge stereotypes and discrimination faced by autistic people. Through advocacy, educational resources, and community programs, AWN seeks to build supportive networks and amplify the voices and leadership of autistic people themselves.

## **Borealis Philanthropy**

Borealis Philanthropy is a philanthropic intermediary that supports grassroots organizations working on racial, gender, and disability justice. Through pooled funds and donor partnerships, Borealis distributes resources to community-led movements across the United States. Their disability justice initiatives aim to strengthen leadership and funding for organizations led by disabled people.

## **Center for Racial and Disability Justice**

The Center for Racial and Disability Justice works to advance justice at the intersection of race and disability. Through research, advocacy, and community engagement, the center addresses systemic inequities affecting disabled people of color. Its initiatives promote policy change, leadership development, and inclusive social movements.

## **Collaborative on Faith Disabilities**

The Collaborative Faith and Disabilities provides resources and guidance to help faith communities become more welcoming and inclusive of people with disabilities. The initiative supports congregations in addressing accessibility, inclusion, and leadership opportunities for disabled people. It also promotes dialogue between disability advocates and faith-based organizations.

## **Disability Justice Initiative**

The Disability Justice Initiative works to advance disability rights through policy research, advocacy, and public education. The initiative focuses on how disability intersects with race, gender, and economic inequality. Its work includes developing policy recommendations that promote accessibility, equity, and inclusion.

## **Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund**

DREDF is a national disability rights law and policy center led by people with disabilities. The organization works through legal advocacy, public policy development, and education to advance civil rights and equity for disabled people across the United States. While broader in scope, its work frequently addresses intersections of disability with race, poverty, and access to services.

## **Indigenous Disability Canada / British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society**

Indigenous Disability Canada (also known as BCANDS) is a national Indigenous-led organization supporting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people with disabilities. The organization advocates for social and economic inclusion, culturally responsive services, and policy change that recognizes the unique intersection of disability and Indigenous identity.

## **Intersectional Environmentalist – IE AADI Database**

Intersectional Environmentalist maintains the AADI (Accessible and Anti-Discriminatory Information) Database, which compiles resources and organizations working at the intersection of environmental justice and disability inclusion. The database highlights accessible environmental initiatives and supports advocates seeking to build more inclusive sustainability movements. It emphasizes the importance of disability access within climate and environmental justice work.

## **Lives in Progress and The Alliance for Citizen Directed Support**

Lives in Progress is a collaborative initiative focused on advancing self-determination and community inclusion for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Working alongside the Alliance for Citizen Directed Support, the effort promotes person-directed services, systems change, and leadership by people with disabilities and their families. Together, they support policy advocacy, community learning, and cross-sector collaboration aimed at transforming disability service systems.

## **National Black Disability Coalition**

The National Black Disability Coalition works to advance equity and justice for Black people with disabilities. The organization focuses on advocacy, leadership development, and community education. Its mission is to address systemic disparities and amplify the voices of Black disabled people in policy and public discourse.

## **National Coalition of Latinx with Disabilities**

The National Coalition of Latinx with Disabilities advocates for the rights and inclusion of Latinx people with disabilities across the United States. The coalition focuses on leadership development, policy advocacy, and amplifying the voices of Latinx disabled people. Its work highlights how disability intersects with language access, immigration, culture, and racial equity.

## **Native American Disability Law Center**

The Native American Disability Law Center provides legal advocacy and education to protect the rights of Native Americans with disabilities. The organization works primarily with tribal communities to ensure access to services, justice, and inclusive systems. It also promotes culturally responsive approaches to disability rights within Native communities.

## **New Disabled South**

New Disabled South is a disability justice organization working across 14 southern U.S. states. The coalition organizes disabled people around issues such as poverty, healthcare access, criminalization, and voting rights, with particular attention to the experiences of disabled people of color. The organization aims to build a strong regional movement that integrates disability justice into broader social justice advocacy.

## Project READY

Project READY is an organization that supports people with developmental disabilities and their families, especially Asian American immigrant families. Project READY promotes education, advocacy, training, and community inclusion to support transition and employment.

## Rainbow Guidebook Resource List

The Rainbow Guidebook Resource List is a collection of organizations and tools supporting LGBTQ+ people with disabilities. It highlights services related to health care, community support, advocacy, and inclusive programming. The guide helps connect people with resources that address both disability and LGBTQ+ identities.

## Ramp Your Voice!

Ramp Your Voice! is an advocacy platform founded by activist Vilissa Thompson that centers the experiences of Black disabled women and femmes. The organization promotes self-advocacy, leadership, and public dialogue about the intersection of racism, sexism, and ableism. Its conferences and media work amplify Black disabled voices and challenge systemic barriers within disability and social justice movements.

## Rooted in Rights

Rooted in Rights is a disability-led media organization that produces digital storytelling and advocacy content focused on disability rights and social justice. The organization uses videos, social media, and journalism to highlight barriers faced by disabled people and to promote inclusive policies. Their work centers disabled voices and perspectives in public conversations.

## Sins Invalid

Sins Invalid is a disability justice–based performance project that centers disabled artists, particularly disabled people of color and LGBTQ+ disabled artists. Through performances, education, and organizing, the organization challenges ableism, racism, and other intersecting forms of oppression. Their work helped shape the modern Disability Justice framework and promotes art as a tool for liberation and cultural change.

## U.S. Gender and Disability Justice Alliance

The U.S. Gender and Disability Justice Alliance works to advance equity for people who experience discrimination at the intersections of disability, gender, race, and other identities. The alliance focuses on policy advocacy, coalition building, and leadership development. Its work aims to ensure that disability justice perspectives are integrated into broader gender and social justice movements.

**Amanda J. Rich** is the owner and CEO of [Open Road Inclusive Community Consulting](#) and the consulting 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 well-being of the human service workforce, trauma-informed and healing-centered practices, and disability justice. Contact Amanda at [openroadicc@gmail.com](mailto:openroadicc@gmail.com).



# Practical Tools and Resources for Intersectional Disability Leadership

By Amanda Rich

- **These resources help people learn about disability and intersectionality.** They explore how disability connects with identities such as race, gender, and sexuality.
- **The tools are useful for leaders, self-advocates, service providers, and allies.** They can support learning, training, and more inclusive practices.
- **Most resources are free and many use plain language or easy-to-read formats.** They can be used for self-learning, team discussions, or professional development.

Resource	Resource Type			Paywall	Description
	Class/ Webinar	Toolkit/ Template	Articles/ Podcast	Yes/No/ Some	
<a href="#">The Rainbow Guidebook</a>		X	X	No	A guide that helps readers understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).
<a href="#">ASAN Proud and Supported Series</a>		X	X	No	A plain-language toolkit that helps self-advocates learn about gender, sexuality, and their rights.
<a href="#">Green Mountain Self-Advocate LGBTQ+ Resources for Self-Advocates, Families and Allies</a>		X	X	No	A resource list with tools to help families and service providers support people with disabilities who are coming out as LGBTQ+.
<a href="#">Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An Intersectional Approach to Leave No One Behind</a>		X		No	A toolkit from UN Women and UNPRPD that helps leaders learn how to apply an intersectional approach in their work.
<a href="#">Disability Philanthropy Forum Race and Disability</a>	X			No	A series of webinars exploring the connections between race and disability.
<a href="#">Race+ Disability Recordings</a>	X			Some	Recorded webinars focused on issues at the intersection of race and disability.

Resource	Resource Type			Paywall	Description
	Class/ Webinar	Toolkit/ Template	Articles/ Podcast	Yes/No/ Some	
<a href="#">New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Toolkit</a>	X			No	A toolkit for direct support professionals that covers topics related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
<a href="#">Berkely Center on Cultural Humility</a>	X	X	X	Yes	Training resources that help leaders learn about and practice cultural humility.
<a href="#">Diversity Equity and Inclusion Metrics</a>			X	No	A blog article that discusses ways organizations can measure their DEI efforts.
<a href="#">Diversity Leadership Alliance (DLA)</a>	X		X	Some	Articles and workshops that help leaders build skills for creating inclusive and equitable communities.

**Amanda J. Rich** is the owner and CEO of [Open Road Inclusive Community Consulting](#) and the consulting 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 well-being of the human service workforce, trauma-informed and healing-centered practices, and disability justice. Contact Amanda at [openroadicc@gmail.com](mailto:openroadicc@gmail.com).



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

## **Title:** [Family and Disability Activism: Beyond Allies and Obstacles](#)

**Author/Editor:** *Pamela Block, Allison C. Careky, and Richard K. Scotch (2025)*

**Description:** This book explores how disabled people and their families who are also part of racial, cultural, and LGBTQIA2S+ communities experience disability rights and justice. It shows how disability connects with issues like racism, education access, and systems of care. The book highlights voices and perspectives that are often missing from mainstream disability conversations.

## **Title:** [The Urgency of Intersectionality](#)

**Author/Editor:** *Kimberlé Crenshaw (2016)*

**Description:** In this TED Talk, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw explains the idea of intersectionality. She shows how people can experience overlapping forms of discrimination based on race, gender, disability, and other identities. The talk explains why understanding these connections is important for creating more just policies and communities.

## **Title:** [Disability Visibility](#)

**Author/Editor:** *Alice Wong (2020-2021)*

**Description:** This podcast features conversations with disabled activists, artists, and community leaders. Episodes explore topics such as disability culture, politics, media, and intersectionality. The show highlights diverse disabled voices and lived experiences.

## **Title:** [Resistance and Hope Essays by Disabled People: Crip Wisdom for the People](#)

**Author/Editor:** *Alice Wong (2018)*

**Description:** This collection of essays by disabled writers explores themes of activism, community, self-care, and hope. Contributors reflect on disability justice and the political climate while sharing strategies for resistance and collective action. The book highlights the power of disabled voices and community solidarity.

## **Title:** [Diversity, Cultural Humility, and the Helping Professions: Building Bridges Across Difference](#)

**Author/Editor:** *Sana Loue, Brandy L. Johnson, & Kathryn LeMoine (2022)*

**Description:** This book introduces the concept of cultural humility for people working in helping professions. Instead of assuming expertise about other cultures, it encourages lifelong learning, self-reflection, and openness to others' experiences. The book explores how this approach can improve relationships with clients, communities, and colleagues.

**Title: Intersectional Leadership: Strategies for Building Resilient Workforces**

**Author/Editor:** Dr. Kimberlee Michele Armstrong (2023)

**Description:** This book explains how organizations can build stronger and more inclusive workplaces through intersectional leadership. It offers practical strategies for hiring, supporting, and promoting diverse employees. Real-world examples show how leaders can address discrimination and create more equitable workplace cultures.

**Title: Standing Together and Finding a Voice Apart: Advocating for Intellectual Disability Rights**

**Author/Editor:** Amanda Rich (2015)

**Description:** This book explores how people advocate for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Through interviews with advocates across the United States, it highlights different strategies, experiences, and perspectives on policy and systems change. The book emphasizes the importance of relationships, listening, and shared purpose in advocacy work.

## Upcoming Events

**Applications/Registration is open for the following programs:**

### The Wisconsin Leadership Institute in Green Bay, WI

**July 12-17, 2026**

The Summer Wisconsin Leadership Institute will be held July 12-17, 2026 in-person in Green Bay, Wisconsin for Wisconsin-based disability sector leaders. Applications are open now, click [here](https://natleadership.org/wisconsin.html) [https://natleadership.org/wisconsin.html] for more information or to apply. Due to generous funding through the [Common Good Philanthropies](#), participation in the program is subsidized.

### The Summer Leadership Institute in Pittsburgh, PA – Celebrating 20 Years of the Leadership Institute!

**July 26-31, 2026**

The Summer 2026 Leadership Institute will be held July 26-31, 2026 in-person in Pittsburgh, PA in partnership with [Achieva](#). Applications are open now, click [here](https://natleadership.org/week-long-institute3.html) [https://natleadership.org/week-long-institute3.html] 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!

### The Wisconsin Leadership Institute in Eau Claire, WI

**October 25-30, 2026**

The Fall Wisconsin Leadership Institute will be held October 25-30, 2026 in-person in Eau Claire, Wisconsin for Wisconsin-based disability sector leaders. Applications are open now, click [here](https://natleadership.org/wisconsin.html) [https://natleadership.org/wisconsin.html] for more information or to apply. Due to generous funding through the [Common Good Philanthropies](#), participation in the program is subsidized.

### The Fall Leadership Institute in Santa Fe, NM

**November 15-20, 2026**

The Fall 2026 Leadership Institute will be held November 15-20, 2026 in-person in Santa Fe, NM. In partnership with the [New Mexico Health Care Authority](#). Applications are open now, click [here](https://natleadership.org/week-long-institute3.html) [https://natleadership.org/week-long-institute3.html] 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!

If you'd like to be notified when we open registration or applications for future trainings including the Institutes listed above, please visit our website at [www.natleadership.org](http://www.natleadership.org) or join our news and events mailing list at [https://confirmsubscription.com/h/y/8EB381E992209CEC\\_form/SV\\_9z9rSudkRwklVPg](https://confirmsubscription.com/h/y/8EB381E992209CEC_form/SV_9z9rSudkRwklVPg).



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