“The Living Well Project: Looking Back & Forging Ahead”

Summary of webinar: August 12, 2025

Background
The Grassroots Project started in 2023. We are now finishing our first full year at this scale. Our aim is to support national, state, and local disability coalitions and advocates in building networks to allow them to stay informed about policies that affect people with disabilities.

Introduction
This webinar is focused on the outcomes and impacts of ACL’s The Living Well Project across the states of Georgia, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Our speakers are:

1. Dr. Jennifer Johnson
2. Valerie Bradley
3. Michaelyn Wilson
4. Dr. Seb Prohn
5. Kaitlin McNamara
6. Sally Flaschberger

Dr. Jennifer Johnson shared that the full name for the Living Well project is "Living Well: Model Approaches for Enhancing the Quality, Effectiveness and Monitoring of Home and Community-Based Services for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities”. This is why they call it Living Well for short. The focus of these projects is on the big changes to where people with disabilities are living. Given that more people with disabilities are living in the community, Community Living is the future. DD Act, Rehab Act, IDEA & ADA have been huge drivers in the shift to Community. People with disabilities want control over their lives and to keep families together. It has taken lots of hard work by everyone to see policy changes on benefits and cost savings of community living.

Abuse & Neglect has been of interest. We have focused more on Health and Safety in HCBS. People can feel isolated in many settings. Many people with disabilities fear reporting abuse and neglect. They may also not know what abuse looks like. The system also faces challenges in health and safety. Learning how to monitor health and safety is a key area. Systems change efforts lead to improved health and safety. Families and self-advocates worked on projects focused on abuse prevention.

Valerie Bradley shared that the push for the Living Well grants came from OIG control of state incident systems. They found they were not transparent, didn't really use data, and didn't respond fast enough to abuse cases. Involving people with disabilities, families, & staff in building these systems is key to any capacity building. Data is also a big part of moving the ball forward in systems change.

All voices are essential in preventing abuse & neglect. People with disabilities & families know best what's needed to protect themselves from abuse. Valerie also shared using evidence-based practice to mitigate abuse stats. DSPs are the backbone of the HCBS system. They must understand the risks that people they support are subjected to. Virginia is one state that took involving self-advocates seriously in key roles. National Core Indicators is a good tool for identifying risk factors, for example, if you have no friends, you may not go out into the community a lot.

Michaelyn Wilson shared how model demos on innovative ideas at DSP level improve outcomes. They used College of Direct Support to offer training on: Supportive Decision Making, Supporting Social Roles, and NADSP Code of Ethics. They had 2 self-advocates on the team. They did DSP staff surveys that showed how many DSPs they lost. They made a health module on health and safety. A lot of DSPs had limited access to Tech. Higher turnover during the period of enhanced jobless benefits. High staff turnover did lead to a lot of cancellations of training during 2021 and 2022. Lastly, they developed pandemic training and helped with vaccine events. A lesson learned is that management must have buy-in for staff development.

Dr. Seb Prohn shared that the Virginia team's goal was to build a better functioning system-one that was improving the quality of life for the disability community. Through the project people were able to learn what parts of the system are healthy vs ones that are not and ways to deal with areas that need work. Their focus areas were employment, abuse, health, family support, inclusive housing, abuse prevention etc. The team got everyone thinking of the system as a living network and they did lots of interviews with diverse stakeholders. They created abuse prevention, health advocacy, and person-centered training. They developed LEAP: Leadership Empowerment Abuse Prevention.

Kaitlin McNamara & Sally Flaschberger shared that they focused a lot on self-advocate leaders. This project work in Wisconsin led to a shift in the way we go about safety and capacity building. They changed their approach to self-direction. Many self-advocates learned about their rights. They saw a shift in how staff respond to concerns only. Families became more informed. It led to better services and lives for people with disabilities. Self-

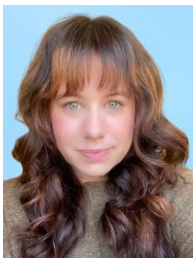
advocates continued to work with the state to offer input on training, policy, and more. The project team saw more disclosures of incidents in the lives of people with disabilities.

Speaker Bios & Photos

Valerie Bradley is President Emerita of the Human Services Research Institute. Prior to January 1, 2017, Ms. Bradley was the President of HSRI since its inception in 1976. Ms. Bradley has directed numerous state and federal policy projects that have contributed to the expansion, enhancement and responsiveness of services and support to people with disabilities and their families.

Sally Flaschberger has 25 years of experience in the disability field and is the parent of a young adult with a disability. At the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD), she served as project manager for the ACL-funded Living Well project, which aimed to improve quality of life, increase inclusion, prevent abuse and neglect, and promote self-determination for people with disabilities through systems change, peer education, and provider interventions to enhance service quality.

Dr. Jennifer Johnson is currently serving as the Acting Commissioner of the Administration on Disabilities (AoD), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living (ACL).



Kaitlin McNamara works at WI-BPDD focusing on projects related to peer-led models of support and education with an emphasis on rights protection, community involvement, and abuse prevention. Kaitlin is also the Executive Director of the Sibling Leadership Network. She received her undergraduate degree from George Washington University·

Dr. Seb Prohn is the Assistant Director of Research and Evaluation at VCU's Partnership for People with Disabilities. All projects and research that he leads include people with disabilities as collaborators and leaders. His work addresses the health, well-being, and community participation of people with IDD.

Michaelyn Wilson is the Program Coordinator for the Direct Support Professional Training and Assessment Program (DSP TAP) housed with the Institute on Human Development and Disability/UCEDD at the University of Georgia. Michaelyn has assisted in the development of a DSPI Entry Level and DSP II Emerging Level curriculum and credentialing exam.

Grassroots Project Information & Contact

The Grassroots Project is an initiative from the Administration for Community Living to develop structures, processes, and relationships necessary to build the next generation of cross-disability, cross-generational, and culturally diverse leaders within the advocacy movement. Its aim is to connect, grow, and strengthen networks of grassroots advocacy and action coalitions supporting each other with the skills and knowledge to advocate for improvements in the quality of community-living support. Grassroots Project webinars are open to the public, and are geared toward grassroots disability advocates, people with lived experience of disability, human services administrators, and providers.

All Grassroots Project webinars are recorded and currently archived at:
https://www.hsri.org/project/the-grassroots-project

Webinar recordings are also posted on YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/@TheGrassrootsProject-hsri

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