



“Expanding Disability Advocacy by Working Together: Successful Practices and Outcomes in Coalition Building”

Summary of a webinar from August 28, 2024

Introduction

This webinar features 3 state and local disability advocates and coalitions. These organizations work to improve disability rights. They share tips on setting common goals. They talk about how to work with others to reach these goals.

Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) Massachusetts

DPC Massachusetts is a statewide group. They advocate for disability and civil rights. They are working on issues like stopping healthcare discrimination and protecting the rights of people who use wheelchairs.

Noel said that good communication within a coalition is important. Sharing updates keeps people engaged. Noel also shares that bringing people together regularly is helpful. Providing resources and giving people chances to speak up is key. Noel adds that decisions should always include people with disabilities.

ABLE South Carolina

ABLE South Carolina is a Center for Independent Living. It is a disability-led organization. They are seeking change at the individual, community, and systems levels. ABLE South Carolina runs various programs. They provide services and do advocacy. They also help educate families on available services.

Kimberly shared that it is important for the coalition to be part of solving problems. She also said to raise up disability pride. People with disabilities can make change. They must take part in issues that affect them.

Sierra said we should continue thinking about the big ideas. It is important, though, to first consider the steps needed to accomplish the big idea.

Ohio Olmstead Task Force (OOTF)

OOTF is a statewide group of Ohioans with disabilities of all ages, family members, advocates, and organizations. They work to ensure people with disabilities have the right to live, work, and participate in their communities. OOTF hosts events to educate lawmakers. They also provide feedback on issues affecting people with disabilities.

Jennifer said that you need to meet often to keep everybody in the coalition focused. She also suggested talking with other organizations to stay informed about their work.

Brittanie shared that it is important to really connect with advocates. They should feel informed. They should also know they can always reach out if they want to talk.



The speakers on this webinar were:



Noel Martin Rubio is a rising nonprofit leader with 7+ years of progressive experience in the social impact sector. As the Development and Communications Director at Disability Policy Consortium, Noel supports the growth of a \$2.7 million annual budget through grant writing, corporate relations, program design, and partnership building. His expertise in organizational advancement and strategic storytelling for small- to mid-sized nonprofits has yielded \$20 million+ in investments to support BIPOC youth, farmers, veterans, and people with disabilities in the Northeast and the Global South.



Kimberly Tissot proudly serves as the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Able SC where she guides the staff in applying the philosophy of independent living to real situations. Kimberly believes in the value of individualized and community-based empowerment as she wants people to recognize their full potential. Under Kimberly's leadership, Able SC has experienced years of growth, success and has become a nationally recognized Center for Independent Living.

Kimberly's road to disability rights began at an early age, after having her leg amputated from a rare childhood cancer, Alveolar rhabdomyosarcoma. Kimberly began deciding her style of mobility, becoming the first soccer player with a disability in her town, and speaking up anytime she was treated differently. Kimberly has over 20 years of experience advocating for disability inclusion on a local, state, and federal level, and internationally!

In 2017, Kimberly led the efforts in the passing of progressive legislation in South Carolina, "Persons with Disabilities Right to Parent Act" and in 2018, and in 2022, ending subminimum wage in South Carolina. Kimberly mentors other Centers for Independent Living across the nation due to her marked success in the field. She also serves as an executive director mentor to other South Carolina nonprofit organizations via the state's nonprofit association. In addition to Kimberly's role at Able SC, she has successfully held multiple state-appointed responsibilities and serves on various state and national committees. Kimberly was also the mastermind behind several statewide initiatives that have led to major systems change in South Carolina. Those efforts include SC's first statewide youth transition conference, Advocacy Day for Access and Independence, SC Disability Employment Coalition, SC Disability Partners in Disasters to name a few.



Sierra Royster is Director of Capacity Building at ABLE SC, responsible for developing and implementing projects to enhance internal and external expertise around independent living, disability rights, and disability justice. She is also focused on enhancing national programming.

Sierra brings a lifetime of personal experience as a person living with disabilities. Before Able SC, she brought 19 years of experience working in the disability community, 15 of those years directly working in independent living. at the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Raleigh, North Carolina she started as the Youth Advocate and



Outreach Specialist and left as the Interim Executive Director. While there she oversaw youth services, the Youth Leadership Forum, Money Follows a Person program, travel training, and healthy relationships and sexuality training, while working with consumers. During that time, she served on the North Carolina Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living Programs (APRIL).

She spent almost 8 years at APRIL departing as the Director of Innovation. While there, she grew national youth leadership opportunities and assisted in organizing trainings on diversity, equity, and inclusion. She played a vital role during the pandemic as an advisor for the White House and Administration of Disabilities, helped create the Disability Access Information Line (DIAL) the national disability hotline, and assisted in data collection and advising on vaccine drives and resources. She has worked with other national disability organizations and the Administration on Community Living (ACL) to ensure that CILs and SILCs were present and could share their consumers experience for Center for Medicaid/Medicare Services (CMS) scrutiny visits with the reviews of Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) under the Settings Rule.



Jennifer Kucera Born with Spinal Muscular Atrophy, Jennifer has been a self-advocate her entire life. She was a college math instructor but now has dedicated her life to systems advocacy. She currently works at the Center for Disability Empowerment, in Columbus, Ohio as their Healthcare Outreach Coordinator, she Chair's Ohio's DD Council, is on United Healthcare's National Advisory Board, and is the Chair of the Ohio Olmstead Task Force which is a grassroots statewide advocacy group.



Brittanie Maddox is the Community Engagement Coordinator for Disability Rights Ohio (DRO) and is Vice Chair of the Ohio Olmstead Task Force. She holds a bachelor's degree in Disability Studies from the University of Toledo as well as a Master of Legal Studies from American University. She has used her education and lived experience to continue advocating for the advancement of disability rights and justice.

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 supports. Grassroots Project webinars are open to the public, and are geared toward grassroots disability advocates, people with lived experienced 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>. Contact us at grassroots@hsri.org.