



NACDD CEO Donna Meltzer on the 30th Anniversary of the American's with Disabilities Act

For the ADA's 25th Anniversary I penned a blog called "The Four Pillars of Integration", where I spoke about, and provided examples of, the amazing work being done by Councils on Developmental Disabilities that address the four pillars of the ADA: full participation, independent living, equality of opportunity, and economic self-sufficiency. As we prepare to celebrate both the 30th anniversary of the ADA, and the 50th Anniversary of the inclusion of the Developmental Disabilities Councils into the DD Act, P.L. 106-402, I am feeling a little less celebratory as I would like as we all cope with the current pandemic and find ourselves living in a very different environment. But what I can still clearly see is that the ADA and its four pillars are helping us to stand strong and tall even as we cope with this deadly and frightening disease that has taken the lives of millions and have seen discriminatory actions take place such as rationing of care and the inability for people with disabilities to have a family member or ally with them in the hospital.

Passage of the ADA has allowed for better community living. The ADA has ensured access to public venues, employment opportunities, housing options, more accessible roads, curb cuts and transportation. The ADA, when combined with the Olmstead Decision (whose anniversary we also just celebrated), has truly defined the importance of community and living where we choose for the best life possible.

While the ADA, DD Act, and Olmstead decision sought to bring people into the community, this coronavirus – COVID-19, has changed how we operate in community, at least for now. Staying healthy has meant staying home from work, staying in our house, and limiting engagement with others in houses of worship, gyms, swimming pools, libraries, concerts, and even jobs. All the things we fought so hard to gain access to we are currently staying away from.

But none-the-less, DD Councils have persevered. Over the last few months, DD Councils have risen to the challenge to ensure that community remains safe and that the pillars of the ADA are strong. I have watched many of you work to ensure that DSPs are designated "essential employees" and have the personal protective equipment necessary for both the DSP and the client to remain safe and healthy. Councils have jumped in to ensure that critical information about the virus has been translated into languages spoken throughout their state or territory to ensure that everyone can learn what they need to know about how to stay healthy, how to protect their loved ones with disabilities, and where to get help if needed. Other Councils have been working through their ABLE Account systems and with their State Treasurers to encourage people with disabilities and their families to set up ABLE accounts or to put money from government rebates into their established accounts. Doing so can help people with disabilities put money away now to ensure their economic self-sufficiency in the future as the money in these accounts does not count against their government benefits and allow for spending on important items like education, employment preparation, and housing in the future. And I have watched as many people with disabilities are engaging in new and different ways to become engaged with other people through media, to find employment or volunteer opportunities supporting others to stay connected and healthy.



The ADA, passed and signed into law on July 26, 1990, remains the backbone for much needed societal and attitudinal change toward people with disabilities. President George H.W. Bush, praised the Act as “the world’s first comprehensive declaration of the equality for people with disabilities, and marked it another Independence Day – one that is long overdue.” This July, as we reflect on America’s independence I hope we will all reflect on what we do to support the civil rights of all Americans regardless of disability, race, color, religion, sex (gender) sexual orientation, and national origin. Together let’s use the platform of DD Councils to fill gaps, innovate change and end discriminatory practices.