How to Connect and Engage with Disability Advocates and Community Toolkit

Diversity of Disability

According to the CDC, approximately one in four people in the US have a disability while the World Health Organization reports that nearly 1 billion, or 15% of the global population has a disability. This makes disability the largest minority. Disability is intersectional, meaning disability crosses all ages, races, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and other groups. Disability is also diverse in individual needs: from hearing and visual impairments to people with mobility disabilities and people with developmental disabilities; it is important to know that organizing to include people with disabilities is not one size fits all.

Allyship and Advocacy Matters

The first step in creating inclusive and welcoming spaces is to understand what it takes to be an ally and advocate. Remember that as an ally and advocate, you are supporting the movement and working WITH the disabled community. Being an ally, you are using your privilege and power to help create a more just and equitable world for all people.

How to become an effective ally & advocate

1. Educate yourself on the disability movement. Research how the movement started, where it is today, problems people face today, and learn about some key leaders. You can start by checking out these movies!
2. Research ableism and help educate others to avoid ableist language and attitudes.
3. Support disability advocate leaders and get involved in the movement. Understand that as an ally and advocate, you are working WITH not FOR people with disabilities.

Kids with disabilities & advocacy

1. Encourage kids with disabilities to participate in leadership. opportunities. Create opportunities for and with children with disabilities to participate in leadership opportunities. This will help children develop self-confidence and self-advocacy. For example, educate about inclusive volunteer opportunities, scouts' leadership opportunities, and other group activities.
2. Create spaces that are welcoming for and with children with disabilities to participate.
3. Prioritize self-advocacy. Children with disabilities representing themselves, their views, and their interests is an important component to a lifetime of independence.
4. Support children with disabilities by encouraging other organizations to be inclusive, use inclusive language, and learn about disability rights.
5. Educate ALL children with and without disabilities about the disability movement and leaders to encourage lifelong allyship.

Person-First & Identity-first Language

1. Learn about the do's & don'ts for disability awareness . https://www.easterseals.com/explore-resources/facts-about-disability/disability-etiquette.html
2. Practice person-first language. This means addressing the person before the disability. Example: She is a wheelchair user, he has a vision impairment, he is a stroke survivor...
3. Understand and use effective communication. This means knowing when and how to use person-first language vs. Identity-first language. https://healthjournalism.org/blog/2019/07/identity-first-vs-person-first-language-is-an-important-distinction/

Be an Inclusive Host

Consider these items when engaging with and welcoming the disability community:

1. Accessibility of place: Is there a step-free entrance? Is there clear signage and/or audio signals for navigating the space? If needed, is there a working elevator? Are there accessible restrooms? Accessible parking? Curb cuts and other moveable features to the built environment? Here are some links to ensure an accessible space:

   - ADA Check List: https://www.adachecklist.org/
   - ADA Check List for Removing Barriers: https://www.ada.gov/racheck.pdf
   - Universal Design: http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/The-7-Principles/

2. Ensure you are giving mindful space for all during meetings and events, .

   - Example: Not rushing or pressuring someone with a speech impairment or providing ample time for an individual to answer questions.
   - https://www.nchpad.org/1794/6974/Toolkit~for~Hosting~Inclusive~Events

3. Ask what accommodations might be needed ahead of time. For example, ask if anyone needs an interpreter, help accessing space, a note taker, alternative reading formats, or anything else that the individual would need to fully participate. Here is a link with some tips: https://eoo.uga.edu/disability-services/planning-accessible-meetings-events
4. Consider the accessibility and inclusion of your website, resources, and webinars for all users. For example, provide captions, accessible fonts in presentations, contrasting colors, descriptions of pictures, and the use of interpreters.
5. Website ADA check list: https://www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/chap5toolkit.htm

Do Your Research

1. Research the internet to learn what disability organizations serve your community.
2. Make time to talk with disability advocates in your community. It's important to understand their priorities and explore opportunities of intersection.
3. Make sure you choose location or a communication vehicle that is accessible for all users
4. Connect with local disability organizations and advocates as additional support.

These steps are a great way to get started on being an advocate with and in the disability community.

Here are some additional resources & organizations:

- https://www.aapd.com/
- https://www.nfb.org/
- https://acl.gov/programs/aging-and-disability-networks/centers-independent-living
- https://www.ncil.org/
- https://www.sabeusa.org/
- https://www.nchpad.org/Directories
- https://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm
- https://drc.arizona.edu/cultural-center/ableism-101-part-one-what-ableism-what-disability
- https://www.section508.gov/create/universal-design
- https://www.nchpad.org/529/2457/

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