IL-NET, a project of ILRU presents

Disability, Diversity and Intersectionality
in Centers for Independent Living

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Making New Friends and Playing Well with Others
Presenters: Elsa Quezada, Ron Halog

ELSA QUEZADA: Good morning, everyone.

[ Speaking Spanish]

Buenos dias a todos. Cómo estás?

How are you?

 Que Bueno. That’s good. So, I'm going to start with this first slide. My name is Elsa Quezada. I'm Executive Director of the Central Coast Center for Independent Living in California, Salinas, to be specific, Monterrey County. Salinas, yeah.
 So how do you sustain a culture of inclusivity? By making sure it's always at the top of your list and not just something you have to address every year because you have to check it off somewhere. You also have to look at the trends, your policies and talk with your staff and your community, your consumers.
 So I was born and raised in Watsonville, California, which is in south Santa Cruz County, which is the county that’s just north of where I live now. My parents were born in Mexico, and they, like many of our families, came from Mexico to California or other parts of the country to work, for a better life, for the economic dream. To have their families, raise their families, get an education.

My parents did not have very much formal education at all, and when they came here, my mom was a migrant worker. Her family worked up and down the state. My dad came over at age 17, the oldest of 10 children as a bracero. How many of you are familiar with the Bracero program? So it was during the '40s when the United States was in a war and so they ‑‑ a lot of their men were in the war, so they needed workers, so they made an agreement with Mexico and brought our men over to this country to work in a lot of different jobs. My father came to work in the fields and that's where he met my mom.

My mom, as I said, also was born in Mexico, but her family came over when she was 4, so she pretty much was raised here, so she was more acculturated. They had the four of us, four children. Myself and my three siblings were all born here. We're first‑generation born in this country. And we were reared with a very strong work ethic and a strong belief in maintaining our language, which is Spanish, and our culture, Mexican.

We are bilingual/bicultural with a strong belief in social justice and equality, and respect for all.

My parents strongly encouraged us to maintain our first language and to be proud of being bicultural. And that was tough during that time, because many ‑‑ I remember many of our other family members didn't agree with that. They wanted their children to become American, so they didn't want them to keep the language. They wanted them to assimilate. And our parents didn't. They saw the benefit of being bilingual and bicultural, and so when we were at school, we spoke English. When we came home, you did not speak English. Unless we were in the bedroom, the kids. Then we were speaking in English, but not around my parents. It had to be Spanish.

They also -- I talked about how my parents had a very strong work ethic and very much believed in education and so they had us work in the fields during the summer, in the strawberries and the green beans and every crop because I live in an agricultural community. Every crop that you can think of. And the purpose of that was to learn how to work, truly work hard, and to appreciate your education and your schooling.

My parents wanted us to experience what it would be like if we didn't get an education. We not only learned that it was not what we wanted to do but more importantly, we learned firsthand the hardships and often the injustices that campesinos experienced. Campesinos are farm workers. We saw it every day. And at that time, while I'm sure there were child labor laws, everyone took their kids to the fields, and we saw that. Everyone pitching in.

We went to work in the fields, not because we had to, but because it was a lesson. Other families, they took their children because they needed that income that their children brought in.

So, these experiences growing up really led me to have an interest in social justice. And I'm moving forward many years. In 1981, I was married. My husband was 31 years of age. We had a year and a half old son. My husband was diagnosed with seminoma, malignant cancer. He survived, but that really changed our path. We were both ‑‑ we met in college. We were both going to be teachers before we married. That was our plan. We were going go teachers and that just took us off that path.

And that began the next phase of our life, and we walked into the world of Disability Rights, very young. Learned about the discrimination, the stigma, lack of access to health care, et cetera, et cetera. You all know it. You all know the barriers.

But it was really difficult for my husband, especially I think because he was 31, strong young man, Chicano, macho, very difficult for him to accept that the course of his life had changed. He really had trouble identifying who he was and what his role was now going to be in the family, because we weren't sort of equal anymore, you know? He needed a lot of assistance. He wasn't going to be able to be a breadwinner. The roles changed.

And in Mexican Chicano culture as I'm sure it is true in other cultures, very difficult, the change in roles. But then I entered the world of Independent Living, and that was really a turning point for me. And in September 1st of this year, it will be 37 years that I've been in this movement.

[ Applause ]

A long time.

[ Laughter ]

And I'm retiring in October ‑‑ October 31st of this year.

[ Applause ]

So, and I'm so grateful to all of you that are entering and that will continue this lucha as we call it, because it is, it's a fight. So, I became Executive Director of the first bilingual/bicultural Independent Living Center in east L.A. in California back in 1981. The early history of the movement at that time was believed to have been started by white guys in wheelchairs. And those of you that are like my age have to remember that. So that was really interesting. There were no leaders of color, and I'm using that, but I really hate that term because white's a color too. It really bothers me when I have to say that. I don't have to. But everybody says it people of color and the concept of Independent Living did not coincide with the Latino culture, which is about family and much more focused on the unit as opposed to the individual.

I listened to families who said that the philosophy did not fit with their culture. So, we changed the services that fit the culture that we were working with. We educated leaders in our movement. I spent a lot of time with colleagues telling them that, you know, this Independent Living Movement that was supposed to be inclusive was actually exclusive, because it was not really welcoming to my community. And that took years, many, many years. I'm really pleased after 37 years to see more deeper conversations and I know it feels like we're not moving the needle, but in my opinion, the needle has moved, tremendously.

So, that slide is how did I prepare now I'm working with the Central Coast Center for Independent Living? So, how did we prepare our organization? A lot of people have said that. Your board and staff have to reflect your community. You have to be involved with community members in making sure that our services address the needs of the community and are offered in a culturally appropriate manner. That means having conversations with community members. That means going out to their meetings, sitting with them as they're having these conversations.

You have to look at your governance and your staff. Does it reflect your community? And of course, all materials need to be in languages spoken in the community. And when we started to translate our materials to Spanish, and started distributing them, we found that they weren't being understood by our community, which means we didn't do our homework in that we didn't check to see: What is the level of literacy in their home language? And we were producing materials at a certain level that wasn't at the reading level that they were at. So, pay close attention to that. In later years we found that was really a waste of resources to put out printed materials because people really weren't reading them.

What they wanted was the engagement. They wanted the personal connection.

So, community partners. You always have to check: Do we have everyone at the table? Are we accessible to everyone? And we say, in our organization, and I say to my staff: The community is your office. We all have a building, but it's out there that the people are, and that's where you need to be. And that traditional way of asking people to come to your office, it works for some, those that have access to transportation, those that maybe know more about the culture that we live in and how services work. But many of the folks that we serve don't know that.

They don't know, and so you need to go out to them, go out to the organizations, as other people have said, go to the organizations and the places where they congregate: Churches, wonderful idea to go to churches. Get to know other community partners that have already established that trust. Because then that can be passed on hopefully to you.

Forming collaborative partnerships, and I say that we could infiltrate because that's how I felt, like I was infiltrating them, and present disability issues, all the while recognizing and calling out our similarities. In the early years, when we started our movement, it was all about making ourselves present, and so we were really pushing disability strong. And in my opinion, not taking the approach that we need to take now.

Instead of calling out folks for not being accessible, it's really looking at: What do we have in common? And then build on that.

So, some examples of forming those community partners. I was asked to join a board of a low‑income housing developer who focused on building housing for farmworkers. So a new opportunity to collaborate with an agency that was building much‑needed housing, but was narrowly focused on farmworkers. So, it was an opportunity for me to teach them that many of these farmworkers were actually individuals with a disability, and that we were seeing many of their residents who had sustained work‑related injury and they themselves didn't even know that they had a disability. They're like, I got hurt at work, but I'm fine. And were filing for Workers' Comp which was also those of you who work with consumers going through that system, it's horrible to navigate. There were also many farmworkers with family members, children, extended family members, who had hypertension, mental health, diabetes who also didn't know those were disabilities and that they were a protected class. And they often didn't speak English, nor understood the often complex navigation of systems.

So, after serving as a board member and then I became Chair of that board for two years, the developer is now designing their developments with access for all in mind, which is wonderful. It's wonderful to see. And they're doing more disability awareness training. They're just more conscious, you know, of disability.

So, we worked on the issues that they were working on. That's another way of creating that partnership -- working on and demonstrating honesty, commitment and long‑term relationships. CHISPA, housing for farmworkers then included people with disabilities and elders, low‑income housing became accessible.

I also was appointed to our MediCAL managed care plan, which is Central California Alliance for Health and asked, as a board member, what were the needs of those members at the health care plan and began to develop relationships there and making some changes or influencing changes on policies and how they address the needs of their members.

So, we established and maintained personal relationships and when there's a change in leadership, you have to reach out and start over. It never ends. It's constant.

And it's just a part of the culture. You collaborate, you need to be able to collaborate with partners on potential projects whether there's money in it or not, and that's what I say to staff: It's not about the money.

It's ‑‑ so the money is equally as important as the partnership, but it's really meeting the needs of the community. That should be ‑‑ that's who's at the center of the circle.

So, another example is that CCCIL provided guidance to County Health Clinics about the need for accessible exam tables. We got reports from consumers especially females that it had been years since they had received an annual exam because of lack of access. Fortunately, my Board Chair at that time worked with the clinics and hospitals and she was listening to all that was being said about this issue. She took it back to her office and she was able to secure funding to purchase accessible tables for all the county clinics, and this made a major change for women that had not been in to get annual anythings.

So, when you have a similar goal, money ‑‑ again, it should not be a factor in whether that goal can be achieved. It takes good will and knowing and believing that you're doing the right thing for the betterment of the community. Thank you.

[ Applause ]

RON HALOG: Okay. So, can you guys hear me?

No? Maybe? Okay, perfect.

So, I'm going to come out, I'm a little bit more comfortable in front of you. Mandy, thank you for asking that one question: How to make connections with partners. And that's what I'm going to be talking about a little bit more closely. We started with our staff, our board members, and we just basically asked them: What type of connections do you already have now? Either it's church, some of them are Veterans. Some of them were part of Kiwanis. Some of them were Soroptimists. So, we looked at it and we asked them straight out, how many of those communities know about CRIL? You're serving on the board. You guys are working for us, let's reach out to them and we got a nice little handful of: Did you think about these guys? We'd love to have a presentation at Rotary and we started doing little presentations.

Really quick, how many people here do presentations?

Not even half. Not even half. Okay. Why is that? Is it because you would hate to do a ‑‑ what I heard was that people just don't want to do public presentations, because they don't like public speaking. It's very fearful. Let me tell you, it's scary. How many here have done Rotary -- not Rotary but Toastmasters? Yes, yes, yes? I'm going to tell you a quick story about my experience with Toastmasters. I hope I'm not going to say too much.

I had a friend of mine actually wanted me to do Toastmasters for a long time, and it took me two years to actually go to a Toastmasters presentation. And when I got there, what they do is they have two people who are doing presentations for 20 minutes each. And they'll prepare for a full week, and they'll sit down and they'll get up, and they do the presentation. Meanwhile, the rest of the audience is counting the ums, are they staying on target? Are they clear, whatever? They'll give you feedback afterwards. After the two presentations, they have, I didn't know this, an impromptu presentation, and they take two people out of the group to do a two-minute presentation. My buddy had set me up.

[ Laughter ]

Yeah. He's like, take him. He's really good. He's an Executive Director, he knows what he's talking about. So the host goes okay, you're up. So, they pull me up and they don't tell you the subject. The host comes up with the subject. And the host said: Well, Ron, guess what? You're going to be talking about sex.

[ Laughter ]

Yeah, thank you. Thank you very much. I did the same thing. My mouth dropped, I'm like really? You’re going to put me -- my first meeting, you're going to... Okay, great. So, for two minutes I can't even tell you what I talked about. My mouth was just running.

Meanwhile I'm beet red, sweating bullets, my shirt is completely soaked. I sit down, I put my head down and words are coming out of my mouth of my friend saying how could you set me up like this? Afterwards, I rushed out of the room as fast as I could, and I was going to work and I realized I left my back pack at home so I went home and my wife was there and she's like: So how did it go, your first meeting? I said it was okay. They had me go up and speak. She's like, what did you talk about?

I said, well, I talked about sailing.

[ Laughter ]

She's like, you don't know anything about sailing. You only went twice. I've gotta go. Bye. I left. I literally left, went to work, thank God, I sat down and was doing my work and stuff. And I had come home afterwards thinking this is all behind me. I don't have to worry about it. Got home, my wife says: Well, you know, I ran into your friend, Rob, and we started talking, and I told him: It's, like, he has no idea about that subject. I don't know why he was even saying anything about it. The first time he did it, he fell off and he got all wet, and the second time he did it, he threw up.

[ Laughter ]

And so just to let you know if you want to get a really good experience do Toastmasters. Get out there. Don't be shy to step up. The best thing about doing presentations is you only get better, right?

And if you flub up, it's okay. It's like, you're talking about something that's very passionate to you. Very passionate to you and that has to go through what you're talking about. Disability, I've been doing it for 35 years. I'm not close to what Elsa is at. It's like I love Elsa, and we're going to miss her in California greatly. But as a mentor, I respect her and definitely we're going to miss her a lot. But, invite yourself to the table. Don't shy away from it. Get out there. You've identified some people that you can meet up with.

But then just go. Just like this room, how many here have met some people that you've never met before? Raise your hand. Awesome. Every hand should be going up. Heidi, thank you so much, and I know you're going to be writing your name up there and Heidi thank you so much. It's a connection I didn't even know I had. But you'll never know who you're going to find out.

Really quick before I go on, how many people here are Veterans? Raise your hand.

Okay.

One thing that I give out, sorry, I'm going to move off the screen, one thing I give out is challenge coins. How many people know about challenge coins? Yes, no?

Challenge coins are a military base thing. It's when you have somebody who's been in any type of military team, unit, or anything like that, what it is, it signifies that we are a collaborative of people doing one goal. And what I do is I go out to my legislators or go out to anybody who we worked with and I let them know, I hand this to them and I say: You are now part of our team. You're now an advocate for us even though if you're a legislator or anybody. It's like, you're going to be always thinking about disabilities, about advocacy, and about leadership.

And on the backside of this, it basically has a shield with our name on it that says CRIL and it's a coin. It says: advocacy, disabilities, champion, and independence and on the front side it has our logo. I'll tell you, when I went to Congress and I talked to one of our legislators, Congressman Swallow. You probably know him. He was running for the President, first thing I said is: Where's my coin? He goes it's on the second row. I'm like why is it on the second row? It should be in the first row. Disability should always be forefront whatever we're doing, right?

So, for this, it's like military first of all, I want to thank you for your service. You guys, definitely, definitely. I take pride in this one. I've got two left so we're going to have two exercises at the end of this. One of you guys are going to be able to take them home with you. It will be fun.

So, and again, Elsa was talking about grants. You know, I think grants are great, but they are not the catch‑all. But grants have a good way to connect us, and if you are out there and they start knowing about what you're doing, what you can do is those people who are out there will say: Well, we know about disabilities. This grant is specifically for that ‑‑ for disabilities and what we can do. Housing, for example. How many people here have mainstream voucher?

Mainstream voucher housing, through the federal government, HUD? They've got $150 million coming out that's going to be funding your Housing Authorities. If you're not hooked up with them, please reach out to your Housing Authorities. It's money that's going to be going for vouchers to get people into housing, and it's mainstream vouchers.

They will come out to you for that. Also, just keep going to these meetings. If you're uncomfortable with it, it's okay. Get that uncomfortable feeling, go into it. Meet one person. Let them be your wingman. I think I jumped over that one, but let them make sure that they are connected with you so you can have somebody that has similar ideas of what you want to do. That way, you're not going into this by yourself.

Also, ask to present to the group. Again, any kind of presentation you're doing, a 10‑minute, 20‑minute, 30‑minute, whatever you can do to get that information out. Volunteer with the groups. One thing that I've learned is that a lot of people, it's a give and take, and just because you want to build that connection, sometimes you have to take your first step towards them.

Build that, connect with them. They'll learn about what you're doing and before you know it, it's going to be symbiotic. They're going to be coming to you for it. Really quick question again is how many people serve on a board?

A committee?

Keep them up. How many are on two boards?

Keep them up.

Three?

Four?

Five.

Six.

Seven.

Eight.

Nine.

Oh, my God. Ten. Oh, I didn't see you. 11. 11 boards, committees. Get out. Get out. Just for that, you know what?

[ Laughter ]

Holy cow.

[ Applause ]

That's a champion. Again, get out. Serve on those boards, serve on those Committees. Hate to say it, I'm on 12. You're good. You're good.

But it's tough. And you have to balance your time. But serve on boards. I just ‑‑ I was here, guess what? I got elected to be Treasurer. Here, and for the State of California for CFILC, I just found that out. So, it happens. Again, if you're out, get out. People will recognize you. They're going to ask you to step up all the time.

And oftentimes, staff members are your best resources. How many people here actually promote your staff internally? Yes? It's a great way to build some people. Thank you, thank you. It's a great way to make sure that staff are stepping up, building within your own organizations, but then if they're doing presentations that are out there, it's interesting on how much the community starts identifying with your staff person.

I'll go out to community meetings and they'll say: Oh, yeah, we know Michael. He comes to our meeting every month faithfully and it's a great way to get them promoted.

And also, when positions come available, when you're recruiting, try to recruit from outside of the disability field. I know it's a hard thing to do. Because you want to get the person that has the most experience with disabilities. It's interesting to find out that there are so many other people that have come from marketing, sales, you name it, different ‑‑ you name it, different areas of the community, that will come in and do a fantastic job working within a CIL. Sorry, we call it CIL or we call it ILC, you guys call it CIL. But they do some great work. Especially if you're highlighting different languages, it's always been helpful for us to have that as a priority for our management team.

And then also there's other groups that are out there, senior services coalitions, advocacy groups, the aging, ADRCs, yes? I'm seeing some nods. How many people here know about ADRCs? And if you don't, Jen is right there. She can tell you all about it: Aging and Disability Resource Community, we call it connection.

But it's a great way to start networking with your other groups.

And then once you're out there, these organizations are going to start referring you to them, or them to you. So, it's very systematic, very fluid. It's helpful because what ends up happening is that you're just going to be sitting there one day and they're calling you up and just telling you: Hey, we need your services. We need you.

And that's the most important thing that you want to get from this, is that you're doing your outreach, not knowing if it's going to be beneficial at all. But just keep on going. Don't let that stop you. There's been so many times I've been in meetings that I don't know anybody, but I can guarantee after six months, I'm going to know one person. One person. That's all it's gonna take. And then from that point on, it goes on.

The other thing I had up here, too, was about your services. You guys have some valuable services that the whole community can actually benefit from. We do a wheelchair‑accessible vanshare program.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Woo hoo!

RON HALOG: Yeah, it's different. It's something that I think California ‑‑ we only have one. We're it. It's something that we're just delving into. We had two vans given to us, and through our MARTA, our BART system, and it's been phenomenal. We've had people that are coming out. We rent it out for guess this? $5 an hour. Not bad. But we also get a grant through our City because they wanted it, as well, so it's a win‑win‑win‑win situation for us. But look at your services that you have now. You've got core services. Do you do travel training for example? Travel training could be a big benefit for a lot of people. Seniors will need it.

If you have housing, guess what? I would say 97% of the people who are out homeless right now have a disability. Our numbers grew because our housing coalition came to us saying: This person has a disability. Can you help them and support them? Yes, we can.

So, take a look. Really dive down into what services you have. Your staff are going to be able to tell you: Yes, we can actually promote this. We can actually expand on this one. Okay? And then the last one I have up here is legislators. Again, go to your legislators. If you really want to build a connection with them, they have constituents that are going to them saying hey, I need dot, dot, dot. They're there to be your resource. I've had people, or my state assembly members have come to me saying Ron, thank God you let us know this. I have somebody who has some benefits issues. Can you help them? Yeah, have them come on in. We will sit down and talk to them. It's a win‑win‑win situation. Legislators will love you and so find out what issues.

And we're part of the business acumen training. Thank you, Tim, thank you, Jen, for this. It's like what you want to look for is those pain points in your community, and the pain points, there's many pain points. Housing is one of them right now. What else? Just shout them out?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Access.

RON HALOG: Oh, wait. You want a mic?

Pain points, what are they?

Oh yeah, I'm going to give you the mic.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Accessible transportation.

RON HALOG: Good. Transportation. What else?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Health care.

RON HALOG: Health care, very good. Come on, guys, there's a lot more.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Employment.

RON HALOG: Employment, good.

You going to run it? Yeah, thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I reach to the local shuttle companies in Las Vegas, Nevada.

RON HALOG: Good. Shuttle, shuttle companies. What else? Over here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Accessible housing that someone who's only receiving $771 with SSI can actually live off of.

RON HALOG: Exactly. Accessible subsidized, affordable housing. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Mental health services.

RON HALOG: Mental health.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm Zan. Visitability is still around. Visitability, the ability to visit is a concept. Because if we build homes with access at first it costs nothing so people wouldn't be put in a nursing home because most of the reasons in Georgia they go to nursing homes is they can't get in their own house.

RON HALOG: Perfect.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Universal design.

RON HALOG: Universal design. I'm working the runners today.

[ Laughter ]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We talk about housing and affordable and accessible housing. How about affordable, accessible and integrated housing? Nobody wants to be set up in a quote, unquote, ghetto or some area where it's just ‑‑ we want to be with everyone else, so affordable, accessible, integrated housing.

RON HALOG: Thank you. Good, good, good, good.

[ Applause ]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In Idaho we have a housing shortage but on top of that, the lobby people are trying to push through legislation on rapid eviction, which would have severe detrimental impact to persons with disabilities.

RON HALOG: Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Public education.

RON HALOG: Public education.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Elementary, secondary as well as postsecondary opportunities.

RON HALOG: Excellent, excellent.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We have a lot of really awesome programs with our two Centers but everything comes down to people being able to get to these programs, so public transit has always been a huge issue that we've been working on. We've sued every transit agency in North County and we enjoy a very fruitful, wonderful partnership with all of them now. So, it's really been a benefit but it's still work, right? Because it's not necessarily a part of ‑‑ accessibility is still not necessarily their first thought, but we have consent agreements with all of them that make sure we're at the table making these plans.

RON HALOG: Thank you. Thank you. Did you hear that? They make sure that they are at the table. Okay, that's such an important thing, because again, these are pain points that we're coming up with. These are areas that you can tap into, and be part of that, be at that table. We have another?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, we're working on rural areas for PAS services, quality services for them because they're so limited because they're 60, 70 miles away from the cities, trying to get Personal Assistant services for them.

RON HALOG: Excellent.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We offer ongoing training every month. We have a housing workshop as well as Independent Living skills training, and we also are part of the mainstream housing voucher.

RON HALOG: Excellent.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And we do so many other things but those are some of the more recent ones.

RON HALOG: Okay. Good, good.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Something that I've seen as a problem is medical literacy.

RON HALOG: Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: People with their own disabilities that can't really describe what it is, how it affects them, not properly being able to administer medication, et cetera.

RON HALOG: Perfect. Again, you guys are coming up with some ‑‑ yeah, that's a big one. Susan?

SUSAN DOOHA: People need to know their rights. They need to know what their rights are in housing under the Fair Housing Act, in homeless shelters under the Fair Housing Act under the ADA. People need to know what their rights are in health care settings. People need to know what their rights are in education and employment, and need to learn advocacy skills, and not stay silent while their children don't get educational services and education, or are wrongly disciplined and pushed out of school, or people in housing who are denied reasonable accommodations that they need in order to use their housing, things like that.

ELSA QUEZADA : Ron, back here, Ron. Disaster preparedness.

[ Applause ]

RON HALOG: Thank you. Disaster preparedness, very good.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That's what I was going to say, disaster preparedness which has been a total ‑‑ it has been, how do you say my passion for the past 15 years, that not only are we being served before, during, and after disasters but that we serve on those committees and we be a part of the folks helping out.

RON HALOG: Excellent, excellent. Yes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Access to banking services and understanding money management. We actually put together a board with both people with disabilities from CILs and banks, so to advise us on research we're doing in that area. So, we're talking to all involved, and then the other thing is I've applied to be on a National board that is not even addressing disability issues, but it is addressing financial issues so y'all think good thoughts. I'm hoping I can get in there for the disability piece.

RON HALOG: Great.

[ Applause ]

So really quick, I'm going to wrap that part up. You guys have identified so many things but think about this: All those that you've come across, it's crossing the cultural boundaries. Doesn't matter. We're looking at how our field can actually impact everything that you guys have said. So, think about that. It's like you've listed out over a dozen areas that are issues for our communities.

It's like, just think of the organizations that are already connected with them, and just reach out to them. Invite yourself to those tables.

And then really quick, when things don't go right for you, it's like I'm going to wrap this one up, there's many times that I've been at tables that I'm thinking: Oh, my God, why am I here? They're not going anywhere. I've been at tables that it's just been a complaint session for the last 6 meetings that we've had. There's been no plans involved. It's no identified gaps. How many here have been in that kind of situation?

[ Laughter ]

Okay, I guess it's more normal than not. Here's the thing: Even in those situations, don't burn your bridge. Never burn your bridge. Don't say: I've had enough of you guys. I'm outta here!

It's like there's going to be a time and place that they're gonna come back again, so always keep that connection with you. I'm serving on one committee right now, it's called the ACEMD, Alameda County Elder Multiple Disciplinary Team. Their main goal was to identify gaps in senior services for Alameda County. We identified the gaps, but there's been no plan, no movement.

So, they keep me on the list. I stay on it, but when there's some collaboration that can be done, I'll be the first one there. So, don't burn your bridge.

And then, you know, I hate to go back to the money thing, but I am going to say it: Sometimes money, funding, has a great way to get through your gaps. It's like everybody's going to need it for what we want to accomplish. All those shortcomings that are out there, funding, advocacy work is something that we all need to work on.

And then ‑‑ again, this is about your wingman, making sure that when you do meet up, you have a meeting like this, with any of this stuff, I recommend, you know, find somebody. Find a wingman, somebody who is going to support you as you go through this connection with other organizations.

And then take a look at what the main goal is, long‑term goal is to focus on the quality of services that you have, and the main focus is the success and the supports that you're going to be giving consumers, because that's why we're all here.

So, for this one, again, what happens when players change? It's just hook up with the other people who are there. Find out if they can take on the same lead. Sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes it does. But in most cases, just make that connection with them. Again, don't burn your bridge. The key thing is again, quality of service and successful outcomes of consumers.

So, I think I've got our next set. It's going to be having you more involved. It's your turn. And so ‑‑ is this our old one? I think this might be our old one. No? That's it. Okay. Get in groups of 3, and we're going to discuss this question.

And so, we want you to start thinking about people or organizations that have reached out to you, with new potential partners or connections in your community. When you've been a participant, we want to find out what characteristics in the outreach person or presenter did you find engaging? And what allowed you to feel connected or prevented you from feeling connected? And share an example in both situations.

So, we're going to give you 10 minutes to get together in 3s. I would love to recommend that you don't stay in your cluster but reach out. Reach somebody brand new, guys. So, 10 minutes. Find 3 people.

RON HALOG: Perfect.

So, I've got one coin left somewhere. Who would like to go first? Nobody wants a coin. There you go, somebody wants a coin.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm always first.

RON HALOG: So please report back.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay, so one situation where we were approached to be a partner was there's a new committee being formed in our community. I don't know if you're familiar with this: No Place For Hate community thing, but somebody reached out actually to Mike to participate in the Steering Committee to make our community a No Place For Hate community. And what they were doing was pulling together community leaders from different walks of life, and they reached out to the Center for Independent Living, which was great. The Chair of that Committee, she used to oversee the mental health services for the Commonwealth, so disability was forefront in her mind when she was doing that.

So, we have a big seat at that table, which is very encouraging as we try to drive out discrimination and hate. There's a lot of faith-based organizations there and disability obviously. Who else did I say was there? LGBTQ, so it's really interspersed with a lot of different people and players in the community so it's a really, really great Committee for us to be a part of. They wanted me to chair it. I'm not going to do that.

But ‑‑ so that was a great connection for us that Mike picked me, but we’re not going to talk about that. It's a great connection for the organization, and it started off with a bang and it always has an action plan. We've only had two meetings so far, but we always have things to do. And in fact, CORD is going to be the fiscal intermediary for them, so we’re going to be a real big part of this Committee. And it's allowing us to meet other people in the community even though we've been around for 34 years.

RON HALOG: Thank you. Give them a round.

[ Applause ]

Who else would like to share? Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hello, I'm Robin again from Athens, and my Center was asked to join the transportation ‑‑ the local transit authority and they wanted two disabled people, but we wound up getting three representatives from our CIL because I ride the bus all the time. They said, the regular bus because I have this thing about saying I can't ride the other bus. No, you're representing the general public and we'll take two to represent the disabled and what was appealing to me, that appealed to my inclusiveness level, that they were willing to see that we're trying to make it easier for everybody regardless of age. And I'm glad to say that starting July, people with disabilities and seniors over 65, we ride the bus for free now.

RON HALOG: Wow. Congratulations.

[ Applause ]

Another one. Who else?

Okay, one more. Right up here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We partner with our ‑‑ the transit in Milwaukee, and they actually brought out some buses, or a bus, last week for us to test out their new wheelchair holder, accessibility thing that they have? And so, it was kind of cool. You know, we had about 40 of us out there in wheelchairs and trying out. It's an electronic thing where they can do it by themselves without the help of the bus driver.

RON HALOG: Give a round of applause.

[ Applause ]

LIZ SHERWIN: In our community, we work with the local Housing Authority. So one morning when I got to work, they had a representative there, and they were giving me a plan for building a segregated housing project for people with disabilities. So that was quite insulting.

So anyway, I explained that we did not support that type of segregated housing and whatever and they left very dissatisfied. And then I checked further into their funding for the project, and I found out it was to be funded by the Illinois Housing Development Authority. So, I contacted them and I explained to them that the concept of segregated housing would be similar to those concepts of public housing where African Americans and other people were segregated, and we didn't want to go back to that point with people with disabilities.

So, what happened in Illinois was that when these places came forth and wanted funding from the Illinois Housing Development Authority, if Centers were in their community, they had to get a write out from them to ensure that it was not segregated.

RON HALOG: Very good.

[ Applause ]

One more. Last one.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So hi, I'm Anita from Rochester, New York. A few years back, we got a call from the Monroe County Department of Health. They were setting up one of these pandemic flu clinic kind of things, exercises, what you do during a pandemic flu event and going and getting your vaccinations and all of that.

So, they asked us at the Center for Disability Rights to bring some folks with disabilities down to participate to see if it was all right. So, we did. We took about 12 folks down, and it turned out not to be okay. There were assumptions made, you know, about people with disabilities. They assumed we all lived in a facility or whatever, so they just weren't prepared for people with disabilities to be out in the community during disaster events.

And so we wound up giving them our analysis of that situation that led to actually me serving on their Safety Board, to include people with disabilities in their disaster preparedness plan. And then we got a call saying: Do you know anything about CERT? And can you tell us about, you know, people with disabilities, how do you deal with that? And so what we wound up doing was we did an interactive, not just people with disabilities, but people with varying disabilities, people who were non‑disabled, people with language barriers and all, and we set up that first interactive, integrated class for people with disabilities to be ‑‑ become CERTs. And that also led to a good partnership with the Monroe County Department of Health, and once again, we are still, to this day, involved in their disaster preparedness plans.

RON HALOG: Excellent, excellent. Thank you. Thank you.

[ Applause ]

Thank you, guys. So we're going to have one more exercise. Elsa, you want to take that one?

ELSA QUEZADA : Yes, okay. So now again staying in your groups, think about when your CIL or ILC has reached out or done presentations to people who are new to disability issues and might be potential partners or connections in your community.

Share some examples of when your outreach has been successful.

What factors in your presentation or style do you think allowed the connection to be successful?

And then share an example of when the connection felt awkward, and what elements you might change next time.

So, I think we'll have maybe 8 minutes, because our break is at 10:30 and you can start now.

Okay.

ELSA QUEZADA : Okay. We've got about 4 minutes, if we want to take our break at 10:30.

So, yes, the mic's available. Who would like to start us off? Just raise your hand. Okay, right over here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The mic just happened to be over here, so we grabbed it.

ELSA QUEZADA : Great.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Interesting thing happened at our CIL, in that our Executive Director was doing a regular thing going grocery shopping and there was somebody without an accessible plate parked in the accessible spot. And a lively conversation ensued, which involved a store manager and some other folks, and I won't go into the details of that exchange, but what came out of that exchange was an interesting relationship between the store owner, the representative for the store owners, which was restarting its brand in the area. It’s a bunch of traditionally family‑owned stores that were corporatized and they were facing being closed and the original family members bought back all of the stores.

But we entered into a partnership with the representative from the original owners to provide accessibility information training, not just in terms of the parking facilities or even the direct services to customers, but also in terms of their executive staff. And so, that's turned into an ongoing very fruitful relationship that we've enjoyed with them and has done wonders for getting our name out just in terms of the people who go to these stores, because this is the main grocery chain in the county, basically.

And so that's the situation that started off super‑rocky and with a certain amount of legality involved, but it turned out to be excellent in terms of being able to get the message of accessibility and even Independent Living out to everybody who uses this facility. So that was pretty great.

[ Applause ]

ELSA QUEZADA : Perseverance. Good job.

Others?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thanks. Hi, this is Anita. So, a few years back, when I was working at Center for Disability Rights, we approached our local LGBTQIA2S plus organization because of a lack of accessibility in venues, serving the queer community, and our first meeting did not go well. It was contentious. And they suggested some solutions that were very humiliating to people with disabilities.

And so we kind of left, but we didn't give up, and we kept trying to engage with these folks. But over the years, they had a change in their board, and there were people who got on their board who were very passionate about disability access and about access for deaf and hard of hearing folks. And so once those folks got on the board, we then approached them, and now we have a very good relationship with our local organization to this very day, that now they make sure that there's access, that there's various types of access. That there's access, you know, to ASL, and they partner with the Center for Disability Rights especially to make sure that their venues that they sponsor comply and all are accessible.

ELSA QUEZADA : Thank you very much.

[ Applause ]

Thank you, everyone.

[ End of Session ]