IL-NET, a project of ILRU presents

Disability, Diversity and Intersectionality
in Centers for Independent Living

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Wrap-up of the Day
Presenter: Stan Holbrook

STAN HOLBROOK: We've heard some really good information today. Wouldn't you think so?

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

STAN HOLBROOK: Any take‑aways? Or any questions? I have most of the presenters still here. Do you have any burning questions that you may not put up here that you want to ask people right now as we wrap up? We went over intersectionality. We had a session on it, plus it was spoken to through the journey of American CILs, where we had five different CILs report out. They had different stories, but the threads were, they were intentional, on moving forward to be inclusive of all.

So, any questions for any of these folks? Sorry.

Are you guys ‑‑ oh, yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think it was a fantastic job and exchange of information from everyone today, and I guess, I don't know, it's kind of a question. Thinking about how all of the stories that we heard today from these CILs that made ‑‑ some made -- quite the transformational change, right, to better serving the populations that needed the services and to better link in with those people.

I think that the issue that we have in our area is we went through this transition probably sooner than some, and once we started doing this work, and once we started doing this work for a while, we found that we experienced a penalty for doing this work in an anti‑racist, which is a different ‑‑ a bit of a different thing I think than diverse. Not either is better or worse, but I think they're different components, right? Once we started going into an anti‑racist stringently activist space, charging and magnifying people with disabilities to use their voice and their bodies, to speak out, is when we started suffering some horrific consequences that frankly caused people their lives. People were not able to get transportation to places they needed to go which resulted in death, in a couple of instances, right? People's job security was gone, and that affected them being able to keep the level of health care that they needed to live, and they died. And we have a wall at our CIL of people who sacrificed to sue all of the transportation agencies in our County, for instance. We did that. Now we're on a collaborative Board with all of them and enjoy a fruitful relationship. So, the question is, and maybe it's just something for folks to think about, going from knowing how CILs do this work now, wonderfully, once you start doing this work, and you do it for a while and you're experiencing a penalty now, from within our network, right, what do you do? So, I guess throwing that out as a next step in terms of this information exchange. When the resistance from doing this work the way that it's been modeled, when there's resistance after you do that from inside our networks, from inside our ranks the way it's been in Indiana, I think some type of skill and relationship sharing should be dedicated to that. Because this is all great stuff that we heard about. It doesn't come without consequence and I think Indiana and a whole lot of other places are great examples of that and I think we can learn lessons from that and teach each other how to overcome that, too.

STAN HOLBROOK: I'd like to speak to the comment. I believe there are consequences when we start movements, but the good far outweighs the consequence. I can't speak directly to your situation, but you said something that said the great work that CILs are doing now, and how this is very good information now. And maybe that information wasn't available when you guys moved, and I'm sorry about that. But what I will say, that as we continue this journey, we're going to fall. And things are going to happen.

It's not how many times we fall, and I'm not really minimizing anything that's happened because I don't know, but it's how we get up, and how we move forward to do what's right. And I think you said you were trying to do what's right.

AUDIENCE: And needing to learn about that ‑‑ and needing to learn about that process I think is very important and something that needs to be given voice to because I think that's the next step. So, it's not even kind of a criticism, although there does need to be an atonement. I think what are some examples of CILs that have gone that next step, experienced the repercussion, and are trying to ‑‑ not trying, are fighting to push forward, I think, would be a natural continuation to this amazing conversation today.

STAN HOLBROOK: And I thank you for that. I think we've got examples here differently of where CILs felt consequence of not doing the right thing, and they lifted themselves back up to move and do the right thing. Same concept. But you're right, it's not going to be perfect. Everything we do is not going to be rosy. There's going to be some falls, but I say if you believe in this work, if you believe what you’re doing is right, you get back up. And you continue to move forward, just like your heart is telling you, just like your heart told you and everybody's here, continue to move forward.

We can't stop.

SUSAN DOOHA: I want to learn more from you about what happened. Because doing anti‑racist work is so critical, and it's so important that the disability movement be part of that effort. We have experienced some consequences. We had a White man file Civil Rights complaints against us for discriminating against him as a White man. To me, that's a badge of honor.

[ Laughter ]

And I'm kind of proud of that. We have had people who have left, but my view is if they weren't going in the direction we were going, they needed to get off the bus.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, for sure.

SUSAN DOOHA: And so far, we continue to push the edge, as right now we're pushing hard, working with people who are asylum‑seekers, refugees, people without documents, and working with that movement to protect people in the city.

And we have very, very large newcomer communities from all over the world, and we have seen other organizations targeted for ICE raids. A shelter in our community was targeted by ICE. A shelter for women survivors of domestic violence. And they knew what to do, and they kept ICE out.

[ Applause ]

AUDIENCE: Yay!

SUSAN DOOHA: So, we're taking a leaf from their book, and we're training our staff to keep ICE out.

[ Applause ]

KIM GIBSON: This is Kim, and I want to talk about the consequences, like you said. With staff, there's a consequence like you said, get off the bus. I had a staff member who was like: Well, I don't want to lead the LGBTQ group because it's against my religion, and stuff. And I'm like, you know, this isn't the place for you, then. You have to make your decision. Our decision is that we're a community. It doesn't matter anything, so that piece.

Also, I talked about our group, Us Protecting Us, which is a peer‑led group facing police brutality, people of color with disabilities and police brutality, and Anthony Hill happened to have been right here. And we have to, of course, that whole aspect with ACL and our grants and making sure that we're having a fine line, and then at the same time, providing that peer support and allowing that peer support.

So really that's where we utilize volunteers, because we're not ‑‑ you have to draw that fine line. But also, how you work with the networks, the police and everyone else, so the negative doesn't overtake the positive actions you're doing. So, it's kind of a playing game, and so with any kind of action like Stan said, there's always going to be consequences. The thing is you have to be mindful and think through things and don't let it defeat you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My name is James Turner. I am the volunteer Coordinator of disABILITY LINK. When I started, I started as a volunteer. One thing led to another. When I first met Kim, I was given the position and it was said: See what you can do with the volunteer program. I was at my highest, I mean, the volunteer program was rocking. I mean, it was Monday through Friday, we had volunteers coming out the walls.

Then I got comfortable, because I felt, oh, I ain't gotta worry about it. It's going to run itself. Then one day, I was approached as: Do you need some assistance? And I didn't understand what that person told me, but when I got back home, I started thinking about it.

Because this is not ‑‑ I always tell the volunteers, this is not my program. This is our program. We're here to make it the best we can. I'm here to tell you, I was given 90 days to bring the program to where it is today. 30 days passed by. Nothing was happening. 60 days passed by, nothing happened.

That 89th day, I was at home, I was at home, and I was getting ready to go to work, and something just clicked, and when I got to disABILITY LINK, things just started popping. Volunteers, I hadn't seen in four to five years started coming. The volunteer program at disABILITY LINK right now what Kim was talking about, I mean, we have volunteers during the week. We even came up with a volunteer handbook. It took us two years to put together, Kim, myself, and my supervisor. Like I said, if you love what you do, you'll give it your all. I love what I do at disABILITY LINK.

Sometimes I go a little bit overboard, but if you have a passion, you're going to give it your all. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was going to answer sort of a what do you do when you get some pushback. Is this on? Yeah. All right, one of the things that I do is I work at our Pride Center running an LGBT people with disabilities group. And the Pride Center in Vermont has done a really good job of having, we have a career and trans, people of color, we have the disability, and they're sort of a loud voice in the Vermont community. And because of that, a few months ago, we were targeted by White nationalists, and they sent threatening messages and they plastered signage over our front door, and made the Center shut down for a day for staff and community safety.

But what we did in response to that was we weren't the only ones that were targeted. There was a synagogue. There was a migrant justice organization. And so, what we did was we had a family celebration. We had the Pride Center and the synagogue; everyone came together in Church Street. Like, it's kind of like our town square sort of thing, and we all just like celebrated and shared the love and just were there for each other. And really just, we came out en masse and showed people that we were all going to stand together.

So I would say, if something comes up like that, know that you have allies, and they're not necessarily the people that you might expect, Like, the Pride Center and the synagogue hadn't ever really, like, hung out before.

[ Laughter ]

But we did and it was cool and now we have a bigger family and more friends.

TIM FUCHS: Cool.

REYMA MCCOY MCDEID: Okay.

[ Laughter ]

So I hope that my response you find to be ‑‑ have relevance, Lorrell, but CICIL is an anti‑racist organization. Probably one of the only openly anti‑racist organizations in Central Iowa. And because of that, and because of some of the things that we've done as an organization and some of the things that I've done as an individual, including running for office last year, and speaking very openly about dismantling systems of oppression, like what? In Iowa? Black girls talking about this stuff?

Anyhow, all of that has led to me bearing the dubious honor of being the most hated woman in Iowa politics.

[ Laughter ]

I'm like, shit, that sounds great to me. I like that. Sounds so edgy!

But, and so with that has come a lot of ramifications. We get reported on a regular basis by people who have an agenda. So much so that ‑‑ and I'm talking about folks that are peers, colleagues that I would consider colleagues in Iowa, so much so that our program Manager at VR, when she gets calls about CICIL is being bad again, she gives me a call and we have a running joke about it, you know. And that's fine, but it also shows up in other ways; and this is actually something I haven't spoken about publicly.

But about a year ago, I ‑‑ my daughter and I were threatened. Somebody threatened to blow up our house, and it was because of the very muscular advocacy that we do at CICIL, and that I do on an individual behalf. What we have done -- we are committed to being proactive 24/7 -- and so what we've done is, like, the wonderful person before me spoke about, we've gotten very focused and very intentional in our partnerships in Central Iowa, and with regards to our intentional focus on anti‑racism, has brought forth some pretty great partnerships that have been wonderful supports with the indigenous community, and with particular emphasis, and with the LGBT community, especially trans‑Iowans. So when you know that other folks, especially folks that are kind of on the fringe as well, have your back and they have your back, it can help to navigate these very difficult waters in a way that ensures that your well‑being remains intact, as well.

And this is an ongoing thing at CICIL. It's something that we deal with constantly. We're constantly getting phone calls from people that are irritated or pissed off about what the Executive Director has done this week or last week or whatever. And so, that also brings into the conversation, me being a support to staff, to deal with that kind of thing, as well. Because they go out into the community and they hear negative things about the divisive Executive Director or whatever. And a few weeks ago, our Operations Director came to me and told me that somebody had told her that we missed out on a particular funding opportunity, because we were seen as being a too political of an organization.

And it's amazing to me, because this is a colleague that's also involved in the disability world. And what I said to Operations Director was: Think about it this way: When we're talking about disability advocacy, we can be as assertive and downright aggressive as we want to be. Piss on pity, and everybody gets super jazzed about that but the minute you take that same energy and you talk about race and racism, then everybody's like: Oh, well, you know, we need to be polite.

[ Laughter ]

You're not being polite, Reyma. You're going to lose some allies, but we never talk about how our fears about losing allies, when we're talking specific to disability.

And that's just really interesting to me. You know, I have never heard a… What’s that?

AUDIENCE: That's a conversation we need to have.

REYMA MCCOY MCDEID: Right. Well, we're having it right now.

AUDIENCE: That's the very specific, so having it right now, I think that's the very specific conversation that needs to be a focus on a whole one of these. Because what happens when you do all of this great stuff we heard about today? That's just as much as preparing CILs for what's going to happen, as much as finding commonality with each other, who have these stories of doing this work and facing ramifications and busting through them. So not just good intentions. Good works. Absolutely. Yeah, and again, same thing happened to us. We don't have a relationship with Vocational Rehabilitation, right? Well, we do. It's antagonistic.

But the people who we sued, the best of collaborators now, and it cost us some relationships, it cost us some funding opportunities, because we are anti‑racist, exactly the same thing I heard. We are anti‑racist. Not just diverse, I think that's where you have to start.

If you don't start there, you're not going to get to all of these other cool names and all that stuff, right? Because we are that. There is a consequence but understanding what that consequence looks like in the IL community, I think that's the thing. The same thing I've been saying: There has to be a realization of what that looked like in our spaces and what that's going to look like outside our spaces too, but there has to be a recognition of the penalty of what that looked like in our space.

So, I'm agreeing totally with everything that everybody said.

REYMA MCCOY MCDEID: I know this won't be much consolation, but I know, and I feel with every breath of my being that history is going to be very kind to those of us who are having these difficult conversations right now. Currently, we're dealing with a lot of pushback and I do not like knowing that a lot of people dislike me, and that hurts me. But the conversations still need to be had, and what's right is not often what's popular and what's popular is not often what's right.

And so the folks that are pushing back right now, and we've got people on the inside, people who are allies, and they are the biggest pusher‑backers. Pusher‑backers, I just made up a word but it's true.

History is going to be very kind to those of us who are kind of on a lot of people's shit list right now, excuse my language. The other thing I want to say is what I have appreciated about this project is how it has organically just formed itself. CICIL had the pleasure of being involved from the initial stages, when Sharon Lynn made those phone calls and I asked her, what's this look like? She's like, we don't know and here we are two years later and it's become this thing and I think, Lorrell, what you're speaking about, I would be very surprised if this did not become a centering focus for this particular project.

Not immediately, but very much down the road.

STAN HOLBROOK: Wow, that was real. But that's what we want. That's what we want to hear from everyone. Thank you for your comment. Thank you for all the follow‑up comments, because it is real. I guess it's near time to let you guys go. What do you think?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

STAN HOLBROOK: Oh, you want to stay? We can stay for another hour and a half.

[ Laughter ]

Well, some people said if you let them go to the bar first. No, but I want to thank you for your participation. I want to thank you for being real. And I hope you bring that same energy tomorrow. Be here bright and early. What time do we start, 9:00? On the dot. Thank you all, and I want to thank ‑‑

[ Applause ]

Give the presenters a hand, please.

[ Applause ]

[ End of session ]