

CAC Corner: The future of the Advocacy Movement | CPD

Alison Lozano

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Note from Gordon Richins, CPD Consumer Liason: The following article was written by Alison Lozano, a friend of mine and the Executive Director of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities. She addresses an issue I have also noticed as I advocate within the state of Utah and on a national level. Read her article and decide if you agree or disagree when she states, "There is definitely a graying of the disability advocacy community." We as advocates within the disability community pride ourselves in our ability to get involved and help bring about a change in the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. I would like to hear back from others as to whether you agree or disagree, or possibly just send me thoughts or suggestions that you have on addressing the issue of the graying of the disability advocacy community. Feel free to call or e-mail me at 435-797-2832 or gordon.richins@usu.edu.



Aging self-advocates will need to step aside to allow young people to assume leadership positions in self-advocacy

The future of the disability advocacy movement

By Alison Lozano, Ph.D., MPA

Those of us who are parents, self-advocates and professionals in the disability advocacy community attend many conferences and meetings per year. If you sit at the back of the room it is interesting to note how many bald and grey heads there are between you and the podium. Your conclusion would have to be that there is definitely a graying of the disability advocacy community.

Many of us became involved with the disability community in the 1970's and 1980's when we had to work hard to bring people with intellectual and developmental disabilities out of the shadows and into the mainstream of society. In many respects we have been very successful--we have downsized many large institutions and visibility for disability issues has become fairly common. However, we still have a long way to go for individuals with developmental disabilities to truly be part of their communities and society in general. And this is the very reason we have to increase our efforts to support and train those who come behind us to be strong and effective advocates.

I would suggest the best people for this job are the self-advocates themselves. It is of great importance that we invest in the training and strengthening of self-advocates to carry the mantle of the disability advocacy movement. Even those of us who are parents do not understand the issues that affect the lives of those who live with developmental disabilities. Parents and professionals are so often occupied with caring, protecting and nurturing that we lose sight of the civil rights and quality-of-life issues that are important in everyone's lives.

Therefore, we have to support the development of skills in younger self-advocates so they can advocate for themselves and their peers. We need to make sure there are training opportunities in place so they can learn and nurture their leadership skills. And, those of us who have been advocates for a while, those of us who are graying, need to step back and let them take the lead. For many of us it is hard, because, of course, we know best. But, the only way they will learn is by doing. If they stumble along the way, or do things differently from how we would do it, then we must endeavor to let them do it their own way.

At the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, we have a Youth Leadership program that focuses on teaching youth to advocate for themselves. These young people are the future of the movement and we need to support them to be the new disability advocacy leaders when those of us with the balding and graying heads take to our rocking chairs.