

**Final Report- AUCD Disability Policy Fellowship**  
**Laura Walker**  
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**1. Summary of Activities**

Over the past year as the Policy Fellow at AUCD, I have developed a good understanding of the complexity of the AUCD network, as well as how the work of the UCEDD and LEND programs intersect with federal agencies and Congress. In addition to this, I have built relationships with key individuals in other national disability organizations and Congressional staff on the hill. As a result I have a good understanding of how to more effectively impact systems that affect the lives of people with disabilities. I have also honed in on strategies to positively impact legislation, funding and policies that directly affect our network.

**a. Legislative Affairs**

Over the course of the past 11 months, I had the opportunity to engage with a wide range of issues and legislation that impact the lives of people with disabilities. I spent a considerable amount of time tracking and analyzing three pieces of legislation in particular: Older Americans Act reauthorization, ADA restoration and amendments to the Stafford Act.

My experience working with the Older Americans Act introduced me to affecting the entire legislative process. When I arrived at AUCD, Kim Musheno and the past Policy Fellow had participated in the White House Conference on Aging. They had developed recommendations around the Family Caregiver Support Program, specifically to include within the definition of: (1) "child" to include individuals with disabilities; and (2) "family caregiver" to decrease the specified age for relative caregivers. I tracked the development of this language and ensured its inclusion and original intent was included in the final enactment of reauthorization.

My involvement with restoration of the ADA was particularly exciting for me considering it is the seminal civil rights legislation. As a Disability Studies student learning about the history of the disabilities rights movement, I could never have imagined working this intimately with the Act. I was able to brief my district's congressman before he attended a hearing on ADA restoration- hearing words that I had written spoken in an official hearing in the House of Representatives was a surreal experience. It made me realize how much one person can do.

My involvement with the CCD Emergency Preparedness Task Force gave me the opportunity to work on amending the Stafford Act to address the needs of people with disabilities in disasters. This is another piece of legislation I was able to see move all the way to the President's desk. I saw the true nature of "behind the scenes" crafting of legislation and how to truly impact the process through

relationship building and coalition work. I regret not being able to participate in the next stage of this process, working with FEMA to make sure they are compliant and implement the provisions we worked so hard to ensure were in the final bill.

#### **b. Technical Assistance**

The activities I engaged in around technical assistance were primarily to support AUCD's Council on Community Advocacy (COCA) and working on a project under AUCD's technical assistance contract with the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. Both activities were opportunities to gain a larger understanding of the work of UCEDDs and helped me to better understand the work of my own UCEDD in Missouri. Supporting COCA was very enjoyable—they have a cadre of strong leaders that ensure the voice of self-advocates and family members is included in the work of the Association at the national and international level. My experience developing orientation materials for consumer advisory committees allowed for the opportunity to interact with the Administration on Developmental Disabilities and understand the relationship of ADD with the Association and their UCEDD grantees.

### **2. Major accomplishments**

My major accomplishment this year was creating the *Orientation Curriculum for Consumer Advisory Committees* under AUCD's contract with the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. I began this project from scratch and was able to grow it through learning from Directors and individuals that have served on or coordinated a Consumer Advisory Committee at a UCEDD. In addition to working closely with individuals in the AUCD network, I was also able to gather information when developing the materials by conducting an interactive workshop at the national self-advocacy conference on strategies to work with self-advocates to feel included and prepared when asked to advise professionals. I am very proud of the finished product and feel like my hard work will contribute to the enhancement of the work and contributions of CACs throughout the entire AUCD network hopefully for years to come.

### **3. What you think you got out of your year here**

I know I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work so closely with the entire network and get a year-long, intensive introduction to the inner-workings of congress and the federal government. I grew personally and professionally beyond what I thought was possible for myself. I can't express in word the gratitude I feel toward George Jesien, Maggie Nygren, Kim Musheno, the wonderful people at AUCD central office and countless individuals in the AUCD network that gave me so many gifts this year. I know I will carry this knowledge and strength with me in my constant efforts to contribute to a better life for people with disabilities.

I have made connections with leaders in the disability field both within the AUCD network as well as through AUCD's connections with other national disability organizations. I also had many opportunities to meet disability champions in the advocacy world as well as on the Hill.

**4. Any challenges or problems you encountered**

Balancing my technical assistance activities (AUCD staff support for COCA as well as my work on the TA project) with the legislative affairs work was the most challenging aspect of the fellowship. Legislative affairs work can be suddenly demanding, necessitating the delay of longer-term projects.

**5. Suggestions for future fellows**

First, I would suggest to future fellows that if you have not done so already, relationship-build with your state delegation once you arrive in DC. Let them know about the resources in your state for people with disabilities and that you can be a resource for them and serve as a conduit to the disability advocacy world in DC during your fellowship.

Do not feel hesitant to get engaged with the efforts of CCD task forces. They want and need fresh ideas from people who have first hand experience with what the needs of people with disabilities are at the state and local level. Also, your active participation will generate relationships with leaders in other nationally recognized disability organizations and can lead to opportunities in the future.

Be aware of any opportunities to attend meetings, conferences, hearings, briefings, etc., that match your interests. This is an invaluable way to gain insight and cutting edge knowledge on the topics and aspects of the disability field that you are passionate about.

Below are conferences, events, meetings I found useful and would recommend the next PF attend:

- CMS conference (may be difficult to get into)
- Disability Data meeting/conference (Interagency Committee on Disability Research)
- ADA anniversary (recommend AAPD's after party- opportunity to meet disability and civil rights leaders)
- Spend a day at AMCHP conference with Crystal (good intro to MCH world)
- Any of the National Health Policy Forum events <http://www.nhpf.org/>
- Annual self-advocacy conference
- Events/conferences at UCEDDs in the vicinity
- NDRN conference- gained a much better understanding of the work of P&A's
- Accompany Maggie to MTARS or TA visit at UCEDDs in vicinity of DC

- National Conference of State Legislatures

Finally, enjoy living in our nation's capitol! I have grown as a result of this experience both personally and professionally in ways I could have never imagined at the outset of my fellowship. Living and working in DC was the perfect setting for this growth.