



National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems

Build Back Better: Striving for a Post-Pandemic World that is Person-Centered and Inclusive for All

Summary of a webinar from December 13, 2021

Introduction

This webinar is about lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The speakers on this webinar are:

- People with disabilities,
- Family members,
- Direct support professionals, and
- Advocates.

Speakers shared what we can do better in a post-pandemic world.

Hear from the Speakers

Nicole says that the pandemic created some opportunities for people with disabilities.

1. Work from home options.
2. More telehealth options.
3. More virtual conferences are easier for advocates to attend.
4. More outdoor activities!
5. More ways to take part in research.
6. Don't have to wear dress clothes all the time (smile!).

There are also some concerns such as:

1. Websites, like to sign up for vaccines, are in-accessible
2. Unstable housing
3. The mental grind

During the pandemic Susan worked to keep her son, Andreas, active. She had to balance keeping him and other family members safe. It raised her awareness about listening to him.



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Deyanelin is a direct support worker. For a time, the person she supported decided to do telehealth visits to keep them both safe. She says telehealth brought them closer. Her agency created a virtual support group for DSPs. “So far it has helped us to deal with the changes and emotional effects of the pandemic. We have lifted each other up on difficult days; giving each other hope for the future.”

Sarah says, “Remote accommodations in education, medical, employment those are all being taken off the table because it’s ‘post-COVID’ – which it really isn’t. We know that these are reasonable accommodations now.”

How do we make sure things are person-centered?

Deyanelin says we can spread hope on a daily basis. “We can carry on with the dreams and goals we had prior to the pandemic. Helping those we support with living their life to the fullest.”

Finn says, “The way things were before were not acceptable.” He says that people with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse. It is important to watch out for signs of abuse.

Susan feels that there are opportunities. She says, “When the system isn’t working, we might come up with more creative solutions.”

Deyanelin reminds us, “Don’t forget to have fun in the process!”

Sarah recommends the Job Accommodation Network (askjan.org). It helps employers and job seekers understand rights with accommodations.



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Nicole LeBlanc has a keen ability and interest in public policy and excels at communicating the needs of people with developmental disabilities to public officials. Nicole is a natural leader chosen by her peers due to her unwavering commitment to speaking the truth to power. She currently works as the Person-Centered Advisory and Leadership Group (PAL) coordinator for NCAPPS. Her motto is “control your own destiny, or someone else will.”



Finn Gardiner is a disability rights advocate with interests in educational equity, intersectional justice, comparative policy, and inclusive technology. Finn holds a Master of Public Policy degree from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University and a bachelor’s degree in sociology from Tufts University. Finn is currently the Communications Specialist at the Lurie Institute for Disability Policy at Brandeis University.



Deyanelin Galvez, DSP mentor for The Center for Family Support, is a member of the agency's workforce committee. She assists in the Individual Support Services (ISS) department, is a virtual support planning specialist with the innovative team, and recently received her CQL (Council of Quality and Leadership) certification to conduct people-centered interviews. She wears many hats and is proud to wear each and every one of them. Her mission is to advocate for and assist those we support so that they can live their best lives.



Sarah Blahovec is a disability rights advocate and activist. She currently works as the Voting Rights and Civic Engagement Organizer for the National Council on Independent Living, where she advocates for greater accessibility in elections; educates the disability community on voting rights and works to energize a disability voting bloc; and addresses barriers to running for office for people with disabilities. Sarah is the creator of Elevate: Campaign Training for People with Disabilities.



Susan Yuan is the mother of Andreas Yuan, who is 47 years old. Andreas doesn’t speak but communicates by supported typing. Susan retired from the University of Vermont but continues training in Advocacy and Leadership and does parenting skills assessments of parents with IDD to help them keep custody of their children. She serves on the VT State Standing Committee for Developmental Services, and the board of Upper Valley Services, which serves Andreas.