

DD Network Collaborations

Sixth Annual African American Conference on Disabilities February 17th – Register Today!

The 6th Annual African American Conference on Disabilities (AACD) presented by UnitedHealthcare Community Plan will be held on February 17, 2017 at the Desert Willow Conference Center in Phoenix, AZ. The conference was attended by more than 200 participants last year, including individuals from California, New Mexico and Nevada, and we are excited to build upon that success for this year's conference! Conference participants have the opportunity to attend more than 20 workshops, covering topics such as self-advocacy, police engagement, disabled veterans, mental health, access to care, Alzheimer's, housing, blindness and culture, restraint and seclusion, legal ethics, abuse and neglect, and more. Seven units of Continuing Legal Education (CLEs) and Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are available for professionals attending the conference.



This year, Dr. Matthew C. Whitaker will provide the keynote address. Dr. Whitaker is the founder and CEO of Diamond Strategies, LLC (DSC) – a diversity, equity and inclusion consultant firm. He is also an award-winning educator, author, community engagement specialist, motivational speaker, and founder of the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy at Arizona State University, where he was a professor of history for 15 years. Most recently, he received the Arizona Diversity Leadership Alliance's 2016 Diversity and Inclusion Leader Award. He is also a co-founder of the Healing Racism Public Dialogue Series, winner of the 2008 National League of Cities Promoting Inclusive Award, and the recipient of ASU's 2015 Pioneer Award for working to improve African-American life, community and culture.

The AACD is spearheaded by the Arizona Center for Disability Law (ACDL) and Ability360. The DD Network has been a longtime partner, and continues to support the conference through co-sponsorship and presenting workshops on youth to adult transition (Sonoran UCEDD), employment, voting and educational rights (ACDL), child welfare (Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council), and school discipline (Institute for Human Development). We look forward to seeing you there!

**To register as a vendor or attendee: www.aacod.eventbrite.com
Register Early – space is limited: Accommodations will be provided**

For more information on the Conference, sponsorship & vendor opportunities, please contact:
Renaldo Fowler, Arizona Center for Disability Law | (602) 274-6287 or
David Carey, Ability360 | (602) 443-0723

Follow us on FB: @AfricanAmericanConferenceOnDisabilities | Tag on Social Media #AACD2017

AZ Employment First Initiative – Updates

Over the last year, the group of stakeholders (government agencies, schools, employers, service providers, advocacy organizations, and members of the AZ DD Network) involved in the AZ Employment First Initiative has continued to meet, expand and begin implementing the [Employment First Strategic Plan](#). Accomplishments to celebrate include the creation of two new positions in Arizona to lead this initiative. The Sonoran UCEDD, in partnership with the Rehabilitation Services Administration/Vocational Rehabilitation, hired Susan Voirol as its Phoenix Manager for Employment First & Transition Initiatives to lead the efforts in moving this initiative forward and expand the reach of the UCEDD. Additionally, the Division of Developmental Disabilities positioned Margaret Corcoran as Employment Services Manager, to co-lead these efforts. These positions show the commitment from partnering agencies to this initiative.

In addition, three subcommittees have been established to address: **Communicating the Employment First message, Employer Engagement, and Systems Transformation**. In addition, an Employment First website is under development, plain language materials are being created, and the Employment First message is being spread throughout Arizona through local and state presentations addressing all audiences. We are thankful for the support and collaboration among the stakeholders, and look forward to exploring additional ways to create awareness and work together as we increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Arizona.

To learn more or to support this important initiative, please contact Susan Voirol at svoirol@email.arizona.edu | 520.549.7145
For general information and AZ Employment First documents, visit <http://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu/az-employment-first>



Arizona's Legal Options Manual – 3rd Edition Available Online

The Legal Options Manual is a guide to advise individuals, families and caregivers about different legal options for adults with a disability who need assistance—all with a goal of preserving as many rights as possible. The Manual is a product of the Arizona DD Planning Council, Arizona Center for Disability Law, and the Native American Disability Law Center, and the 3rd edition includes updated legal information. The manual also includes forms that are easy to print out, fill out and tear out. The updated manual is available online in English and Spanish.

If you would like a hard copy, please contact the ADDPC at (602) 542-8970 or addpc@azdes.gov



[2016 Legal Options Manual](#) | [2016 Manual de Opciones Legales](#)

Are You Connected? Join the mailing lists of the AZ DD Network

The Arizona DD Network sends out this newsletter, *The DDNN*, annually to share information about the major work and collaborative efforts of the four network agencies with the community. Want more? Keep up to date on all DD Network Partner news and events throughout the year by joining each centers' mailing lists and listservs. You can also follow each center on social media. **Get Connected Today!**

AZ DD Planning Council

Send an email request to addpc@azdes.gov



Arizona Center for Disability Law

Send an email request to center@azdisabilitylaw.org



Institute for Human Development

Send an email request to ihd@nau.edu



Sonoran UCEDD

Subscribe to our list at <http://eepurl.com/IB5dX>



Network Partner Updates

AZ DD Network Leadership – New Executive Directors

The Arizona DD Network welcomes two new executive directors at the Arizona DD Planning Council and Northern Arizona University's Institute for Human Development. We want to thank Larry Clausen (ADDPC) and Rich Carroll (IHD) for their service and partnership throughout their tenure, and wish them the best of luck in retirement!

Council Names New Executive Director, Dr. Erica McFadden

Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC)

Dr. Erica McFadden knows a thing or two about how to support people with disabilities. As an individual with cerebral palsy and nearly 20 years of hands-on experience in the disability field, she is stepping into the director's role at the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council in its mission to support innovative projects that serve the [100,000 Arizonans](#) with a developmental disability.



"I want to hear what big ideas people have because it's going to take big ideas to move the needle and make significant change for Arizonans with developmental disabilities," said Dr. McFadden. "I'm excited to use my passion and energies toward tackling barriers and highlighting solutions.

"Disability access to education, employment, and overall community life remains one of the most significant unrecognized social justice issues of our time," she added.

Dr. McFadden comes to the Council after years of partnership in her work as a senior policy analyst for the Morrison Institute on Public Policy at Arizona State University (ASU). Prior to her move to Arizona, Dr. McFadden served as executive director of LINC Inc., a community-based service and advocacy organization for people with disabilities in Illinois.

"It's an honor to have her at the Council," said Council Chairman, Ray Morris. "Erica brings a lifetime of experience and I'm looking forward to working together in enhancing the quality of life for Arizona's residents."

Dr. McFadden holds a doctorate in Public Administration and Policy from ASU, a master's in social work from Virginia Commonwealth University, and dual bachelor's degrees in Business Administration and Spanish from the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to her duties as researcher and director, Dr. McFadden has worked as a counselor, consultant, educator, professor, grant writer, lobbyist and marketer in the aging and disability fields.

Outgoing director Larry Clausen is retiring after nearly seven years with the Council. "I'm pleased to pass the torch to a top-notch leader like Erica," Clausen said. "Council members will have a solid partner with lots of passion and expertise."

IHD Welcomes Dr. Kelly Roberts as New Executive Director

*Institute for Human Development (IHD)
Northern Arizona University*

Dr. Kelly Roberts has worked in the disability, education, and health and human service fields for more than 29 years. During this time, she worked as a teacher in grades 6 through 12, researcher, assistive technology specialist, postsecondary education instructor, and administrator. She has extensive experience working with individuals from multicultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as with individuals with a broad range of disabilities.



Dr. Roberts comes to IHD after working at the Hawaii's UCEDD for more than 17 years, and serving as the director of the Pacific Basin UCEDD for about 10 years. While her experiences are varied, her primary areas of interest include assistive technology, learning disabilities, and research related to disabilities across the lifespan, including community integration and transition from high school to postsecondary education and/or the workforce. Her passion lies in improving the quality of life of all individuals, but particularly those who are economically disadvantaged and who have limited access to services.

Dr. Roberts expressed excitement about working with the amazing staff of IHD, NAU personnel, and state and community organizations: "The opportunities available at IHD are extensive and, where opportunities do not exist, we will work to create them in order to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and other marginalized groups."

Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access (PAVA)

Arizona Center for Disability Law (ACDL)

The Center's Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access (PAVA) project builds collaborative partnerships, provides voter training and education, and has worked with election officials to protect the rights of voters with disabilities. The mandate of the PAVA project, which was created by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), is to ensure the full participation in the electoral process for individuals with disabilities, including registering to vote, casting votes and accessing polling places.



Over the past year, the Center has reached out and collaborated with the self-advocacy community (People First of Arizona, Youth Action Council of Arizona, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered) in developing and implementing successful statewide voting rights trainings. The trainings were held in Phoenix, Tucson and Flagstaff, in partnership with election officials from Maricopa, Pima and Coconino counties.

The Center and members from Arizona's self-advocacy community were invited to present at the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) national conference held in June 2016 in Baltimore, Maryland. NDRN considers the collaborative model developed between the Center and the self-advocate community in Arizona as a best practice model for Protection and Advocacy agencies.

PAVA Election Day Hotline

On election days, the Center operates a Voter Hotline to address any concerns a voter with a disability may have regarding their rights. During the March 22, 2016 Presidential Preference Election, the Center received more than 230 calls. The vast majority of these calls were related to the long lines and excessive waiting time to vote. The Center staff worked with Maricopa County Elections to address the issues relating to the March 22nd election.

On November 4th, Center staff monitored six early voting sites throughout Maricopa County to access the length of waiting time for voters. There was a significant reduction in the waiting time compared to the March 22nd Presidential Preference Election. Between November 7th and 8th, the Center received 271 related election calls.

On November 8th, the Center's Hotline received a complaint from a caller with a visual impairment regarding his inability to vote privately and the poll worker's inability to operate the accessible voting equipment. The Center contacted the Maricopa County Federal Election Compliance Office to assist in resolving the caller's inability to vote privately and independently. With assistance from the County compliance officer, the caller was able to cast his vote privately and independently.

Arizona UCEDDs Awarded AIDD Grants to Increase Diversity and Cultural Competency in the Disability Field

The Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) awarded Fall 2016 National Training Initiative funding totaling over \$1 Million to 22 UCEDDs. The grants seek to build cultural competence capacity within and increase the diversity of leadership, staff, and governing bodies across the DD network. They also seek to increase the number of people from underrepresented communities who benefit from AIDD-supported programs and to improve the recruitment and employment of people from underrepresented communities within the UCEDD network. The two UCEDDs in Arizona received two of the four Minority Serving Institution Planning Partnership Grants, and IHD received one of 17 Diversity Fellowship Program grants.

Sonoran UCEDD and Tohono O'odham Community College Partnership

*Sonoran UCEDD
University of Arizona*



The Sonoran UCEDD and Tohono O'odham Community College (TOCC), a tribal college located on the Tohono O'odham Nation in Southern Arizona, is developing a disability information, education and student exchange partnership. The goal is to forge a sustainable partnership to increase knowledge and skills of both UCEDD and TOCC students and faculty on disability, culture, services and supports benefiting diverse communities. In addition to developing a plan for a well-defined partnership to achieve education and student exchanges, other objectives during the next year include facilitating student exchanges by bringing UCEDD trainees to TOCC to learn about the role of culture, custom and tradition and by creating mechanisms for TOCC students to participate in disability internship/trainee experiences with the UCEDD; conducting disability topic workshops with TOCC faculty, students and community on the Nation; and developing a curriculum and sustainable on-line disabilities studies course suitable for use by TOCC and other tribal colleges. Adam Murry, PhD (pictured right), Sonoran UCEDD Research Associate, is coordinating the project. Dr. Murry is a member of the Ft. Sill Chiricahua Apache Tribe, and he has worked with tribal communities on a variety of research and educational projects, most recently in the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona. His research interests include organizational development and mixed methods research to improve educational, employment, or health outcomes for Native American youth and adults.

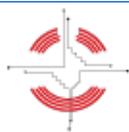


IHD Receives Diversity Fellowship and Community Partnership Grants

*Institute for Human Development (IHD)
Northern Arizona University*

The Institute for Human Development was recently awarded a diversity fellowship grant to enhance efforts to recruit and retain underrepresented groups in the disabilities workforce. The Institute will work with university departments on campus to recruit a first-year graduate student who is interested in a profession in the field of disabilities who is also a member of an underrepresented group. Following these efforts, the Institute selected Diana Del Cid (pictured right) who is a first-semester graduate student in school psychology. Through the fellowship, Del Cid will participate in university and state leadership events. She will continue her work with the IHD/Puente de Cuentos research project, which aims to enhance kindergarten readiness of young Spanish-speaking English language learners through the implementation of a dual language curriculum. Del Cid hopes that her involvement with the IHD will bring more awareness to the realities of mental health and disability issues within the community.





**NAVAJO
TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**

The Institute also received a complementary award from AIDD that will establish a partnership between the Institute for Human Development and Navajo Technical University (NTU) in Crownpoint, New Mexico, with the

intent to engage Navajo scholars in the field of disabilities. This is an exciting opportunity, and staff and faculty at the Institute are looking forward to working with NTU to develop this partnership.

NAU-IHD's \$3.5 Million Grant Award: Making a Difference in the Lives of Tribal Members with Disabilities

*Institute for Human Development (IHD)
Northern Arizona University*



On October 1, 2015, the Institute for Human Development (IHD), housed in Northern Arizona University's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, received a five-year, \$3.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to establish the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC). The successful grant award is attributed to a team of IHD staff who conceptualized and designed an innovative AIVRTTAC model that is both culturally responsive and relevant to the needs of the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) program staff.

The AIVRTTAC will provide training and technical assistance to the AIVRS program staff. There are currently 85 AIVRS programs providing vocational rehabilitation services to tribal members with disabilities who reside on or near designated service areas. The AIVRS programs prepare tribal consumers for gainful employment in competitive and integrated settings. The AIVRTTAC will offer three levels of training in partnership with the AIVRS programs via face-to-face and web-based training. In addition, 10 in-person trainings will be provided during the grant period, and 70 webinars and 20 evidence-based practice guides will be created.

IHD has been successful with past RSA funding in assisting eligible tribes and AIVRS programs through personalized national grant writing workshops and the provision of on-site technical assistance for grant management.

ACDL and the National Association of the Deaf File a Lawsuit to Ensure Text-to-9-1-1 Capability is Provided and Readily Available

Arizona Center for Disability Law (ACDL)

Deaf residents and the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) filed a lawsuit in Arizona federal court seeking direct access to 9-1-1 services through text. The lawsuit seeks to make 9-1-1 services in Arizona accessible to individuals with a disability, including individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. The lawsuit comes as few 9-1-1 centers around the country comply with federal law requiring them to be accessible to individuals with a disability.

Although text-to-9-1-1 capability exists and text access to 9-1-1 services has been required for many years, the State of Arizona and other named defendants have failed to enable this capability. In this case, those with speech or communication disabilities who become victims of crime, who are in need of medical services, or who are in motor vehicle accidents, cannot connect to help directly or immediately. This puts them at greater risk than non-disabled citizens in accessing reliable, time-sensitive and critical life-saving services.

"Federal law requires state and local government entities to afford individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from their services, programs and activities. This includes providing services necessary for effective communication – and certainly this includes access to emergency services," said Rose Daly-Rooney, the Legal Director of the Arizona Center for Disability Law.

The lawsuit seeks a court order requiring implementation of the text-to-9-1-1 system in Arizona. Plaintiffs in this case represent the thousands of citizens like them who live in fear of being unable to obtain emergency assistance.

IHD Continues to Provide Augmentative Communication Services to DDD Clients

*Institute for Human Development (IHD)
Northern Arizona University*



Augmentative communication devices offer a “voice” for individuals who cannot speak or speak clearly enough for other people to understand what they are saying. Some devices are simple with limited message choices, but many are highly sophisticated and offer true communication independence. Determining the best device requires expertise and experience on the part of skilled clinicians who work in collaboration with the client and their family. IHD has been providing comprehensive Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Evaluations to children and adults with significant speech impairments for more than 15 years. IHD recently entered into a new agreement with the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) to continue to provide AAC evaluations throughout Arizona. As part of this new contract, IHD will now also deliver the initial set-up and training to support the client’s successful use of his or her new device.

Debbie Mariage, who has been with the project for several years, has been promoted to program coordinator. Lesley Iacona, M.Ed. CCC-SLP and Nikkol Anderson, MA, OTR/L, ATP are the lead therapists for the northern Arizona evaluation team. Jill Pleasant, MA, OTR/L is the Project Director. NAU recently established evaluation teams in central and southern Arizona to meet the growing demand for this highly specialized service.

In addition to IHD, there are other four other agencies that have contracts with DDD to provide these services. As part of the process, DDD clients and their families select the contractor serving the county in which they reside.

Sonoran UCEDD’s Jamie Edgin Awarded a 5-year, \$2.9 Million Grant to Test Tool for Measuring Memory of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

*Sonoran UCEDD
University of Arizona*

Dr. Edgin is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology and directs its [Memory Development and Disorders Lab](#), as well as Sonoran UCEDD faculty at the University of Arizona. Her research focuses on memory and cognition, often involving children with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities. A few years ago, she created a tabletop version of an interactive game that tests memory (similar to the card game “Concentration”) in response to the lack of standardized memory tests designed for children with intellectual disabilities that she could use in her research. In 2015, she brought her prototype to [Tech Launch Arizona](#) (the UA division dedicated to helping campus researchers move their innovations to market) and was awarded a \$71,000 asset development grant that allowed her to work with Tucson-based Galatea Studios (a firm that does app and game design and development) to translate her concept into an Android touchscreen-based battery of tests. The tests cover a lot of different domains of memory, such as visual recognition, being able to associate pieces of information, being able to remember over a delay, and working memory.



In October 2016, Dr. Edgin was awarded a five-year, \$2.9 million grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, along with additional development funding from the LuMind Research



Down Syndrome Foundation, to continue to develop the tool and test its effectiveness. She is working with collaborators at Drexel University and the MIND Institute at the University of California, Davis to validate the memory-testing tool. During the first six months of the grant, Dr. Edgin will be collecting feedback on the test from a panel of worldwide scientific experts in medicine, pharmacy, memory and intellectual disabilities. This will be followed by in-person testing with children at the UofA, UC Davis and Drexel University.

There are very few assessments that are designed for younger children, as most that are available are for children over 5 years old; similarly, there are testing limitations for children with intellectual disabilities who cannot always complete assessments designed for typically developing children. If found to be effective, the assessment tool Dr. Edgin has created could change how researchers worldwide measure memory in typically developing children ages 3 to 6 and children up to age 18 who have intellectual disabilities such as Down syndrome or Fragile X syndrome, a genetic condition that causes intellectual disability and symptoms similar to autism. While the study is a validation of the tool, it will also help researchers better understand how memory develops in typical children, as well as children with intellectual disabilities.

Arizona Center for Disability Law Welcomed Three New Lawyers in 2016

Arizona Center for Disability Law (ACDL)

Anna Branson and the ASU Special Education Project

Anna Branson is a virtual Arizona “native” having moved to the state at a young age. While in law school in California, she was given the opportunity to work for the Whittier Law School Special Education Clinic, which was devoted to providing free legal and advocacy services for children with special needs and their families. Upon returning to Arizona, she spent the next several years working with her husband in a small civil litigation firm in Scottsdale. However, she always knew that she wanted to return to advocacy. That opportunity presented itself in the form of the joint Special Education Project between the ACDL and ASU’s Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law. The Project, which is funded by the Arizona Community Foundation, is specifically intended to provide legal assistance to historically unrepresented or underrepresented Arizonans. The Project provides a full-range of legal services, including helping parents to obtain appropriate evaluations or reevaluations of their child to qualify for special education services; developing Individualized Education Programs (IEP) or Section 504 plans for students in order to receive all of the services; obtaining assistive technology and therapies that the child is entitled to; ensuring that schools are following the terms of the IEP or Section 504 plan and helping with enforcement if necessary; and attending meetings and mediations between the parties. These services are necessary to ensure that Arizona’s children with special needs receive the “free, appropriate, public education” they are entitled to under the law. To find out more information about the Project or to request services please visit, www.azdisabilitylaw.com or call (602) 274-6287 to speak with an advocate on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays or Fridays from 9am to 1pm.



Chris Carlsen

Chris Carlsen joined ACDL in March 2016 and provides legal assistance to individuals who have been discriminated against through a grant from the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing. He started his career as an attorney for Cardinal & Stachel, P.C., primarily handling family law, personal injury, and appellate work. He moved to Pascua Yaqui Legal Services in 2009, where he handled a large family law caseload, but also became experienced in handling bankruptcies, landlord/tenant disputes, and Social Security Disability appeals. Starting in 2012, he worked in the civil

rights litigation section of the Arizona Attorney General's Office, where he was responsible for prosecuting discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations.

Maya S. Abela

Maya Abela joined the Arizona Center for Disability Law as a staff attorney in October 2015. Ms. Abela graduated from the University of Arizona College of Law in 2009, and began her legal career in Washington, DC as a trial attorney for the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) Environmental Enforcement Section. At DOJ, she represented federal agencies in judicial environmental enforcement actions, and was responsible for both consent decree negotiations and litigation in federal courts across the country. Ms. Abela is firmly committed to public service, and has previously worked in volunteer and internship capacities with the Employment Justice Center in Washington, DC, and Southern Arizona Legal Aid. Though relatively new to the area of disability rights, Ms. Abela and looks forward to working to advance the rights of individuals with disabilities in Arizona for many years to come.



Council Adopts 5-year plan to Empower Arizonans with DD

Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC)

The Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council released its official Five-Year State Plan for 2017-2021 after gathering ideas from Arizonans impacted by developmental disability through 11 public forums in communities ranging from Sierra Vista to Tuba City last spring.

Every five years, the federally-funded Council develops focus areas as part of its role awarding grants and contracts to launch innovative and new approaches to tackling problems and barriers faced by individuals with developmental disabilities. The plan reflects a massive statewide research effort, dubbed the [Comprehensive Review and Analysis](#), discovering the state's successes and obstacles that residents face every day living with a developmental disability.

The Council's state plan identifies a new goal as Council members look ahead to the future for Arizonans with developmental disabilities—creating inclusion in all aspects of community life. That goal joins two others the organization has worked towards during the previous five-year period: increasing employment opportunities and encouraging individuals to advocate for themselves. Moreover, the new plan calls for the Council to consider projects targeting underserved groups such as children with disabilities in foster care, Native Americans and the aging.

The new guidelines took effect October 1, 2016 after approval by the federal Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Washington, D.C.

2017-2021 Goals for the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council

Self-Advocacy/Self-Determination - Establish, strengthen, and expand self-advocacy activities among persons with developmental disabilities so they will become empowered to be self-determined.

Employment - Increase awareness of employment potential of people who have developmental disabilities, link them to resources needed to achieve their employment potential, and foster job creation, hiring, retention, promotion, and self-employment.

Inclusion - Motivate communities to include people of all ages who have developmental disabilities in all aspects of community life.

DD Network Staff Spotlight

Each DD Network Newsletter will highlight a staff member from one of the partnering agencies to recognize their hard work and dedication in exemplifying the mission of the Network to work collectively and collaboratively to foster the independence, advocacy and community integration of individuals with developmental disabilities. **This edition spotlights a council member and staffer of the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council.**

Andrew Robinson, Council Member

Andrew Robinson admits to being a bit anxious about being chair of the newly established Inclusion Committee at the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council.

“My first goal is to understand what it means to be a leader,” Robinson said. “Learning the position, I’m supposed to answer questions that (Council members) ask. That’s part of what being a leader means.”

Several projects fall under the inclusion category of grants the Council manages. Robinson is particularly interested in focusing on one called “Picture of a Life” that helps kids with disabilities in foster care plan for their futures.

It’s an issue close to his heart. Robinson spent a total of 13 years in 15 different foster homes as a child. He is a self-described “late bloomer” which “is pretty typical for autistic people,” he said. Robinson has served on the Council for two years, working on the employment committee prior to joining the inclusion group.

Robinson was born in Dougherty, California, and moved to Arizona in 1979 when he was 18 years old. He earned a degree in computer information systems, and has worked at EF Data and General Dynamics. He speaks fluent Cantonese thanks to his wife Heidi, a native of southern China. They are the proud owners of two birds: Forest and Buddy.

Robinson also has written two self-published books, “The Boy Who Lived” and “How the Autistic Mind Doesn’t Work.” And he feels he offers a unique perspective to the Council. “I’m autistic, I was a ward of the state, I have MS,” Robinson explained.

For him, writing is a way to express his thoughts and experiences, especially through his blog, <http://www.theboywholived.me>

Ultimately, his primary goal lies in building bridges of understanding in the wider community.

“I want to make some kind of progress when it comes to helping people understand people with disabilities, more specifically autism since I’m more familiar with that,” Robinson said. “I always feel like I’m making some difference, but not as much as I’d want to,” he added, noting his time on the Council.

“I’m still hoping I can make a bigger difference so that people like me won’t have to go through what I did growing up. Or even after they grew up. There is a lot of misunderstanding about autism and autistic people. I want to eliminate that misunderstanding as much as possible. It’s a very grandiose goal.”



Michael Leyva, ADDPC Staffer



Michael Leyva is a bit of a rarity in Arizona: He's lived in the Grand Canyon State nearly his entire life.

Leyva joined the Council as a grants coordinator in 2012 after a prior state government career and three years in the banking world.

But what the lifelong Arizonan really cares about is people. "I just have this spirit of wanting to help and serve," Leyva said. The relationship-building and people skills Leyva brings to the Council shines through his day-to-day work overseeing employment-related project grants. "I was looking for something I could be passionate about," Leyva said. "It's a whole new opportunity for me."

Growing up in South Phoenix, Leyva was raised alongside several cultures. "My parents were grocers and my mom was half-Mexican, half-Chinese," he said. "We were sort of isolated in the community as a result. The grocery store was everything for me—it was my play; it was my education."

His passion for people drives the work Leyva puts into the Council's efforts to encourage meaningful employment for individuals with developmental disabilities.

"I oversee the employment projects," he said. "I like working behind the scenes making things work, and building and cultivating relationships."

Those projects include the Employment First initiative, the Work Incentive Information Network, and Untapped Arizona.

"They are all systems change projects, they are all cultural change projects," Leyva said. He is proud of the strides made to get people with developmental disabilities competitive jobs.

"Together and in partnership we are making a positive difference," he said.



The **DDNN** is the newsletter of the [Arizona Developmental Disabilities Network](http://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu) and developed by the DD Network Outreach Committee. Our purpose is to keep the community and our partners updated on Network agencies' projects, activities and collaborations, as well as to provide a portal for local disability-related news. We hope you find **DDNN** useful and informative. **Current and archived DDNN issues are available at <http://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu/ddnn>**

To request any issue in an alternative format, please send an email to ucedd@email.arizona.edu with **DDNN** and **your name** in the subject line or call (520) 626-0442. To submit comments or news items, please email the Editor, Jacy Farkas, at ucedd@email.arizona.edu.

DD Network Outreach Committee Members:

Erica McFadden, Executive Director, *Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council*

Tom Uno, Associate Director, *Institute on Human Development*

Renaldo Fowler, Senior Staff Advocate, *Arizona Center for Disability Law*

Jacy Farkas, UCEDD Manager, *Sonoran UCEDD*

DDNN

