

That's Inclusive!

Podcast Episode 6 Transcript

Episode title: Interview with Jean Crouch, Chair of the NHCDD representing the Department of Elderly and Adult Services.

Welcome to That's Inclusive! Where we talk about disability and what it means to live a full life, engaging in our communities.

What does that look like? And how can we work together to make our world a more inclusive place?

Welcome to That's Inclusive! with Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, the executive director of the New Hampshire Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Hello and welcome back to another episode of That's Inclusive! from the NH Council on Developmental Disabilities. I am your host today, my name is Patricia Vincent-Piet. I am here with Jean Crouch, our Chairperson at the Council. She also works as a Supervisor at the Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services here in New Hampshire and has some pretty interesting perspectives on aging and developmental disabilities. So, we're just going to get right into it. Hi Jean. Welcome for coming.

Well, hello Pat. That you for asking me. This is such a privilege. I'm so happy to be here today to share my thoughts with you.

Yah, I'm really excited that you could be here. My first question is really simple: How did you end up becoming a member of the Council?

Well, let me tell you. This was about three years ago, 2019, as you know I work for the Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services and we actually shared offices with the Bureau of Developmental Services. And a past Council member, named Jan, was looking for somebody who was interested in applying from the Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services and I said "I am!" and so my supervisor agreed. So I filled out an application and I submitted it and I was appointed and I was voted in. So, here I am!

Well, we have been so happy to have you. How long have you been with the Bureau?

I've been with the Bureau about ten years, but I just want to go back on something that I noticed as I was waiting for the process, for the application to be finished. I thought, "Well, I think I'm going to stroll through their website" which is exactly what I did and I found the five year plan, which is actually not the current plan but the previous plan. And I noticed, hmm, there's nothing about healthy aging in this plan. And so I was really very excited, soon after I joined the Council, that I had the opportunity to join the development committee for the five year plan and I was actually very happy to bring healthy aging to the table. Everyone gets older.

Yes, healthy aging is a big issue. I've noticed that it's odd because healthy aging is such a big issue. You hear people talking about it all the time. But in a way, a lot of the things that the media and the public talk about when they talk about healthy aging, isn't really accessible. Like, one way to stay healthy is to walk. What if you can't walk? Thinking about how to age healthy when you always had barriers in the past.

Exactly.

It's a really important thing to talk about. What made you decide to take a leadership position at the Council?

Well, I very much like to support and assist in building capacity within the community. During my first three years I noticed, "Oh my goodness. How much talent is around this Council table." And I'm like, I really would love to play a role in sort of building helping folks build their personal strengths. Because personally I would really like to see individuals with lived experience and who really could lead the Council to where it needs to go. So, I thought, "Why not throw my hat into the ring to be a Council member and maybe I can have a little say in that. And again, I can't tell you how much talent I see around that table.

Right. So you were elected Chair, what last fall?

Yes, this past October, 2022.

Time has flown. What's something you have learned about the Council since you've become Chair?

Well, I learned a lot actually. It's been quite an eye opener. First of all, there are so many moving parts within the Council and there are so few staff people to make that happen. So, when I was on the Council, there was a lot of talk about people need to participate and need to be a working Council but I can really see now how very important it is that our Council members are really working and participating in different areas that we're trying to work on. It's really not about having ideas, it's about really putting those ideas into actions and that's imperative for the success of the Council.

Right. What are some ways, can you give me an example of a Council member who has put an idea into action?

Me! I would like to say our Vice President, our Vice-Chair. He and I have worked a lot together and he has actually grown into quite a gentleman and quite an action oriented person. There are a couple of others that I reached out to as Chairperson thinking maybe I'd have a little bit more, like, "that's a wonderful idea. So, how are you going to do it?"

I'm so glad to hear you say that. Because there are a lot of good ideas, but being a part not only coming up with an idea but being a part of bringing it to life and not relying on others because we do have a limited staff. What do you think that Elderly and Adult Services has in common with DD Services?

Well, I think we have a lot in common. And I'd like to talk a little bit about that.

That would be great.

Well, we both have workforce issues that have really increased isolation with the folks that I support and has affected some critical care needs of the folks that you take care of as well as isolation. We're doing the same thing from maybe from a little different of a population. We combat isolation, especially through the pandemic and it's been horrible especially for both. I know that many of the folks with developmental disabilities had programs and they lost it. It's like all of a sudden, over night, they lost it. And there are a lot of individuals that I support, who are aging that suddenly had no one to come in and help them. And I think we have that in common. For sure, we were both looking at re-framing the words

that we use to describe a person. Re-frame language that implies negative stereotypes that both of us experience and combat against. We all age. Often groups are looked upon, the groups that I support, and folks with disabilities, is being needy--draining the system. High cost of care. And that's how they look at us? Wow. And we both promote a sense of feeling that we're contributing. That's very important to succeed in life, to feel like you're giving something. We both promote a sense of belonging and value. We promote and protect rights and dignity, facilitating full participation in society for the folks that we support. I just want to go back to language a little bit. You experience ableism and we experience agism. And there's a parallel for sure. Like with the elderly, it's elder-speak. And with folks with developmental disabilities it's not person first language. That's a big battle we have ahead of us! So, we should do it together.

Has there been any conversation within the aging community about how to address agism that you know of?

Absolutely. I play a big role in that. As a matter of fact, the first step that we are actually at the Bureau we're doing is re-framing the way we speak. We have pamphlets all over the place that talks about how pathetic it is to get old. What is wrong with that picture? We have to write a lot of grants and the more you say that you're just miserable and just so lonely and you just can't do anything, the more money they give you. Wrong! We try to put into our proposals the positive spin on it and how indeed you can build upon this positive. It's re-framing the message that we're giving.

That's great. Now that you mention it, I even think of a lot of the pictures of older people. You don't see vital, active older people, or if they are active, they are always ambulatory. You don't tend to see many older people who have a disability depicted in an active, happy way. That's a big job that you've got to take on.

And, also too, to sort of address someone with a disability who is aging, that's a whole nother ball game. And actually you and I chatted the other day and you sort of put a bug in my ear and I did some research. And there's a little bit of research on what happens. Because there's a lot of things that happen to someone with a disability and we need to start thinking about that today.

Right, I think about how the aging for someone who has an intellectual disability what happens when they begin to experience cognitive issues. That's not something I've seen or heard anything about.

We really need to educate our medical professionals. Because you're talking about someone with a cognitive disability and let's say they start getting dementia. The physician oftentimes goes "that's nothing". And, that's wrong.

How do you differentiate between an intellectual disability and cognitive decline? And people who know people with an intellectual disability can spot it easily. But I'm afraid that most of our elder care system, they are not equipped to differentiate and give people accessible ideas of ways they can get accessible treatment. Do you see a difference between DD services and elderly and adult services?

That's a good question. I believe everybody's different. But yes I have. And I'd like to kind of share that with you. Many older individuals really are very age-ist. They speak very negative about themselves. They've really bought into the bias of the community or their own implicit biases. Within the DD Council membership and I don't know everything. But I only can really comprehend what I hear, I don't see that in the membership. I don't hear the members, the folks with lived experience with intellectual disabilities, really talk negatively of themselves. And I find that so refreshing. But then again, I don't know how people feel deep inside I only know what they express. And I think that's a positive. Maybe I can learn from that and how to promote that within the population.

That's really interesting. You're talking about what's called internalized ableism. I know personally I have a lot of internalized ableism. Jim gets very, my husband who has cerebral palsy, gets really frustrated with himself. I think there's a little more internalized ableism going on than is always obvious, but I never really thought about internalized ageism and how it's – I've been reading this book called Disability Pride and it's about the changes in the disabilities rights movement since the Americans with Disabilities Act. And how people born since that Act passed have a much different view of disabilities than those of us who are old and were born before. They are far less inclined to internalized ableism. Looking at internalized ageism, it's really important to get people to think about

that. People that Jim is related to are like so afraid that they are going to have to use the wheelchair, even though they've known Jim for sixty years. You can use a wheelchair, it's fine! It's such a weird thing. I'm hoping that the post-ADA generation will be less agist because disabilities is so much more open than, like my generation, General X and the Baby Boomers are.

That's my generation.

You must be at the tail end there Jean.

Yes, actually I am, as you know, I am in the older group. I actually, just to share with you, I experience a lot of ageism.

Really?

Yes, absolutely. I had this eye doctor, not very long ago, it was a new doctor – she was about twelve. Anyway...

She was about twelve?

Well, twelve and a half.

Anyway. She kept calling me 'dear'.

Oh no.

And she kept calling me 'dear'. And I'm like "Just ignore her Jean. Just ignore her Jean". I couldn't ignore it and so, I said, kind of fell out of my mouth but I was so angry because I kept going back and holding it in and I said to her, which is really not like me cause I'm pretty easy going, I said "do you call all your patients 'dear' or just your older ones?" and I just felt awful that I said that but then I never went back to her.

But the fact that you felt awful about that is sort of a little bit about internalized agism. You don't feel empowered to speak out –

Exactly

-when people are agist against you. People call Jim 'buddy' all the time.

See, that's so disrespectful.

Even people we're close to and care about a lot still call him 'buddy'. So, anyway, the last question I have for you is what do you think people should know about the Council?

Well, our purpose is the first and foremost thing I'd like to talk about. We promote dignity, full rights of citizenship, cultural diversity, equal opportunity and full participation for all New Hampshire citizens with developmental disabilities. The Council creates and follows the State Plan – every five years to set goals to address the most important issues facing people with developmental disabilities in New Hampshire. We work to remove barriers and promote opportunities for folks. And lastly, I want to share, well not lastly, I could keep on talking, we at the Council have a fabulous, fabulous website. So I really invite folks, please take a stroll. That's www.nhcdd.nh.gov. Please know we are a resource and we are here for you.

Great. Well, thank you so much, Jean, our illustrious Chairperson. I've really enjoyed having you today. Thank you for sharing your perspective on aging and developmental disabilities. It's something that we just don't talk about enough. And we need to find ways to stop making it a private conversation. So, thank you so much Jean for coming.

Thank you. Thank you very much, Pat.

This was a production of the New Hampshire Council on Developmental Disabilities produced by Isadora Rodriguez, Legendre, and Vanessa Blais with many thanks to Josh Hardy and rest of the crew here at Concord TV.

We love to have guests with differing perspectives. These are personal, and do not necessarily represent those of the DD Council.