
Participants:

Holly Carmichael
Michael Murray
Karen Tamley



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Introduction:

A garrison is a safe place where an army gathers. In the same way, the *Disability Garrison Podcast* is a place for the army of disability rights advocates to gather and discuss complex issues. We are unafraid to identify problems in our world and have difficult conversations about them. But we are not just here to complain. We spend our time brainstorming solutions with generals in the disability rights movement. Together, we take action to make positive change and lead the fight for justice and equality.

Holly Carmichael:

My name is Holly Carmichael.

Michael Murray:

My name is Michael Murray. This is the Disability Garrison.

Thank you so much for joining the Disability Garrison. Today we're going to talk about the independent living movement. The independent living movement started in the 1970s in Berkeley, California with Ed Roberts and a lot of other people with disabilities who were attending the University of California-Berkeley. The goal was to ensure that those of us with disabilities have the right to live independently in the community, and the concept was that we could be supported by our peers and by those around us, the people with disabilities who have that lived experience. And they set up the first center for independent living, and it was incredible. The impact that it had for those of us with disabilities and the vision that we received that we can be fully integrated into the community was phenomenal.

In 1978, the Federal Rehabilitation Act was amended and included this national network of centers for independent living, and it really changed it from a medical model where we as people with disabilities need to be fixed to a community model and a recognition that when you change the community around us, when you change the environment around us, we as people with disabilities can live in the community and contribute in the community and we deserve that right.

And so through peer support, advocacy, skills training, information, and referral, these independent living centers that are now across the country and have thousands of them are having a huge impact for those of us with disabilities. Unfortunately, IL philosophy is not really known. There are still so many that are trying to fix us as people with disabilities. So we're going to look at that problem today and talk about that, but we're also going to talk about the fact that centers for independent living, as great an impact as they have, are still not accessible to everyone in the U.S. So our goal is to make sure that this

valuable service is available to everybody throughout the U.S. So that's what we're going to talk about today, those two things. How can we spread the IL philosophy and how can we ensure that everyone has access to a center for independent living. Our guest today is absolutely phenomenal, and you're going to love her. Thanks for joining us.

I am so excited and pumped. I say that every time, Holly, but I feel like we just get such good folks to come on here and do interviews with us. But today a long-time friend of ours, an incredible advocate, Karen Tamley is joining us. We're going to be talking about independent living philosophy. Karen, how are you?

Karen Tamley:

I'm great. Thank you so much for having me.

Holly Carmichael:

Yeah. No, thanks for being there. And for our listeners, Karen Tamley is the President and CEO of Access Living, one of the largest centers for independent living in the country based in Chicago. Tell us a little bit about yourself, Karen.

Karen Tamley:

Great. Thank you. So I'm a person with a disability myself. I was born with a disability called sacral agenesis and I've used a wheelchair all of my life, a manual wheelchair. I am married. I have a daughter also that my husband Kevin and I adopted that also has multiple disabilities, physical, learning disabilities, hearing loss. And she is now a sophomore in high school. But I've been involved in the disability rights movement, independent living movement probably since I graduated from college. I went to school at UC Berkeley which was really in many ways the birthplace of the disability rights movement, independent living movement. Right? And I had a chance when I was a student there to meet Ed Roberts and Judy Heumann.

But I didn't really become an advocate and activist until I left Berkeley and I did an internship in Washington, DC for a disability rights attorney named Tim Cook who has since passed away. But he really got me started in the disability rights world and so many amazing experiences. I only interned with him for just under two years but he was one of the original writers of the ADA. He worked on the ADA. And when I was interning for him, he invited me to be on the White House lawn watching the ADA be signed into law. Yeah. He sent me down to the Capitol crawl which as you know was a really historic moment in the disability rights movement, really pushing the passage of the ADA over the finish line.

Michael Murray:

I don't think many of our listeners may not know what the ADA crawl was. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Karen Tamley:

Yeah. I mean it was a demonstration at the U.S. Capitol where the ADA was being stalled. And so ADAPT and other disability rights activists really did a very, very visual display of the lack of accessibility in our country. And people got out of their wheelchairs and literally crawled up the steps of the Capitol. And it's a very iconic photo that's shown. I think it was really, really instrumental in helping secure the passage of the ADA.

Michael Murray:

Well, and a realization that if you wanted access to those who are making decisions about your lives, the inaccessibility of being able to do that. And I think it was a great picture not just of the physical inaccessibility but the inaccessibility of our leaders to hear what we as people with disabilities needed.

Karen Tamley:

That's right. So just having those really grounding experiences early in my career was something that really set me on my career trajectory working in the field of disability rights. I think just being on the White House lawn that day, July 26, 1990, even though I was born with my disability, I grew up in a time when I couldn't get on a bus because none of them were accessible, I couldn't cross the street independently because there were no curb ramps. My family, my friends had to routinely carry me into stores and restaurants. But I really had no idea how that day, the signing of the ADA into law, would just fundamentally change my life and the life of millions of other disabled people.

And now having a daughter with a disability, fast forward, right? 32-33 years later. Just seeing how different her life is from how mine was growing up. I wasn't even allowed to go to my neighborhood school until the fourth grade. So it wasn't until the passage of PL92-142, right? The Education of All Handicapped Children Act that really kind of set me on the path towards inclusion. I remember being called into the principal's office in the third grade and being told that you're not going to go to school here next year. You're going to go to your neighborhood school, and it's where my sister went too. And for all those years, I wasn't able to be alongside her simply because of my disability and then I needed some additional assistance in school. And so that was life-changing as well at a very young age. And then going into my neighborhood school where I was the only kid with a disability.

Michael Murray:

Do you remember your first day?

Karen Tamley:

Oh, yeah. I remember my first day. It was scary. It was terrifying coming from a school where it's all kids with disabilities, and there is something like comforting about that. Like everyone is like you. And then going to a school where you're the only kid with a disability. It was very scary. But I ended up making friends and doing well and going on to college.

Michael Murray:

But that trailblazer opportunity not only for you and but also for just society to recognize that we that us not being able to be in our schools with our peers has a negative impact on society and on us. And you breaking that barrier is so powerful.

Karen Tamley:

Yeah.

Holly Carmichael:

And how amazing to have that lived experience where you've seen legislation being passed and kind of see the before and after and then fast forward to your daughter Dominica and seeing how her childhood is different now that those things have been in place for some time. I mean it's phenomenal and I'm sure makes you a better leader for this organization.

Karen Tamley:

Yeah. And I think it keeps me hopeful about the future. When you're doing this work, it's exhausting, it's frustrating, and so many times you're just fighting against things. But I think at every ADA anniversary for me, it's like looking back and just reflecting, like we have made this significant progress. Like I could ride every bus in the country. Most stores or restaurants I can get into or I can at least make the choice of where I'm going to spend my money. The thought of my daughter going to a segregated school, bussed miles away, I know that that's not a reality right now. But I won't say everything is perfect either. We still have a long way to go in every area, in transportation and community-based services, in full inclusion. But it does kind of keep me hopeful to just see the progress that's been made over the last 30 years just in my own lifetime.

Michael Murray:

I love it. Well, I wonder if we can dive into a little bit of both independent living philosophy but also just the birth of the independent living movement. And I wonder if you could just talk about Berkeley a little bit and maybe a story or two from that birth of independent living.

Karen Tamley:

Yeah. So yeah. So Berkeley is one of the places that has really been seen as the birthplace of the independent living movement, really started in many ways by the lived experience of Ed Roberts who was a man with polio and wanted to get into school at UC Berkeley and was very discriminated against because of his significant disability. He used a power wheelchair. He was on a ventilator, slept in an iron lung at night, and was forced to live in the hospital, not the dorm and denied in many aspects of his education. And I think that was really transformational in so many ways because it was a time when disabled people were really starting to reclaim their identities, independence, freedom from the medical model of disability that we needed to be cured and fixed and more quote normal, a rejection of the charity model that we needed pity, we needed money in order to live. And it was really about just reclaiming ourselves as disabled people in a movement that we owned and directed, right? And really fighting off the decades in the very long history of discrimination against disabled people,

institutionalization, segregation, and literally all aspects of American life, right? From employment to transportation to recreation to accommodations to education. You name it. To community living. And we're still fighting that even today. And then I think the disability rights movement took so much from the fight for civil rights and really disabled people being seen as a protected class, disability rights as civil rights, as human rights, right? And also, realization that disability is also universal. All of us are going to be touched by disability at some point in our lives, right? Whether we age, accident, injury, illness, our family members. I think that we don't often think about that enough, about how the work that we're doing to fight for disability rights is really about all of us.

Michael Murray:

Yes.

Holly Carmichael:

Yeah, absolutely.

Michael Murray:

Yes, it's about all of us. And that was what this group at Berkeley started doing. They brought together all of these different folks from all across the country, people with disabilities who said, we want to go to college, we want to be able to have access like everyone else, and started living together inside of the university and building community of disabled people. But they also started fighting for their rights in really unique ways. One of my favorite stories is they made friends with these football players, and they got something passed that said, any time that—this is before curb cuts existed—and so anytime that they had to redo the sidewalk, the city said, okay, we'll add in curb cuts. Well, that's great. But how often do you really redo sidewalks? And so what they did was they went around with sledgehammers and these football players. And so it was people with, wheelchair users and these big burly football players with sledgehammers in the middle of the night, busting up sidewalks so that the city had to go in and add curb cuts.

Karen Tamley:

Breaking barriers.

Michael Murray:

Breaking barriers.

Holly Carmichael:

Literally. Yes, yes.

Michael Murray:

Yeah. Well, and that was what birthed this independent living movement, and they got together and they created a center, the first center for independent living.

Karen Tamley:

Yeah, absolutely. Was started in Berkeley and access living followed that. And Mark Bristow was our founder and went out to Berkeley in the 70s to see what was happening there because it was a revolution in so many ways, that this idea of a center that was run and governed by disabled people for disabled people with disabled people about self-determination, self-control, people directing their own lives and the services that they need. Providing peer support to each other is really a foundational principle of the independent living movement, right? That it's, again, going back to that rejection of like it's medical professionals telling what's best for us, right? And about disabled people helping each other. And we may not all have the same disability, but there's common threads that run through our experience as disabled people around discrimination and barriers that we face and perceptions, that that was really, really important and still is a very important principle of independent living is disabled people making decisions and supporting each other.

Michael Murray:

Yes.

Holly Carmichael:

And now there are centers for independent living all across the country, one right here in Chicago. What are some of the core services that independent living centers provide or that you provide here at Access Living?

Karen Tamley:

Sure. So we're all federally funded and state funded and have required core services that we need to provide as centers for independent living. So those are independent living services. So really the idea, again, around self-direction, the disabled people are deciding for themselves what they need, where they want to live, the types of supports that they need in the community. So that is a core service. Advocacy is another core service. So this idea that we really need to break down the systemic barriers that keep disabled people marginalized and oppressed and segregated and prevented from living self-directed, fulfilling lives. And so I think for us, that's a really, really important principle is also that connection between advocacy and direct services. Because we cannot do advocacy or policy reform, helping to fight systems that keep people with disabilities out or segregated if we don't hear from disabled people themselves. Without hearing that day-to-day lived experience over and over again, we wouldn't be effective, authentic advocates to push for more affordable accessible housing in our city, right? And working with the housing authority and the city of Chicago and the state at all different levels to fight for that.

Michael Murray:

Well, and I think the—tell our listeners about the makeup of your staff and your board and what's required in order to have a center for independent living grant from the Department of Education.

Karen Tamley:

Right. So we're required to be a majority people with disabilities on our board. So we have about 60% of our board identifies as a person with a disability, and our board members come from all sectors. They're disabled people who have received services from us. They're people in corporate America. They're people that run organizations or at universities. So we have a really diverse board, but a majority do have disabilities. And so I think having the fact that we're run and led and governed by a majority of people with disabilities really does make us unique. So I think that's another core important foundational principle of the independent living movement is really that self-direction and the leadership of disabled people at all levels within the organization.

Michael Murray:

And you truly live it because it's your board. But also isn't it like 65% of your staff or people with disabilities?

Karen Tamley:

Yeah. A large number of our staff, varying disabilities, people with physical, sensory, mobility, intellectual disabilities. You name it. And in all levels of the organization as well.

Holly Carmichael:

And you have close to 80 staff members?

Karen Tamley:

70 staff.

Holly Carmichael:

70, yeah.

Michael Murray:

Yeah, I love it. And I think that one of the things that you guys makes you a leader is from everything and in every way, you guys are thinking about those of us with disabilities. We just got an incredible tour of this building. I wonder if you could talk about some of just the physical aspects of accessibility that you guys have been so innovative here at Access Living.

Karen Tamley:

So we're now 42 years old as an organization. We were founded in 1980, and our first office was a store front on the street right down here on South Street. Yeah. And we've just grown over the years, and now we own our own building that we built in 2007 right here in downtown Chicago. We are a universally designed, green lead gold building and really wanted to kind of pull together and marry the concepts of environmental design with accessibility. And I think what's really great about this building is that in many ways, it was designed by disabled people. So we led a lot of listening sessions by people that would receive services in our building and come to our building with different types of disabilities. We did listening sessions with other organizations that had interesting universal design elements. And

so I think it's really a great example of inclusion and accessibility in ways that you don't even like visibly immediately see, right? So we really tried to make the accessibility features seamless. So things like color contrast on the walls or flooring and how we think about that in terms of wayfinding. We were very intentional about the carpet that was going to be usable for people with mobility disabilities but also for people with sensory disabilities as well, thinking about things like lighting and ease of moving throughout the building. We have bathrooms with no doors, for example. We have push buttons at all of our conference rooms.

Michael Murray:

Which by the way, the bathrooms, no doors on the bathroom, it's great for the ease of getting in. But also, when I get done using the bathroom, I don't actually really want touch a door handle.

Holly Carmichael:

Yeah.

Michael Murray:

It just makes sense.

Karen Tamley:

Especially in this COVID era, right? And that was another thing. I think maybe we're ahead of our times because I had so many people tell me during the pandemic, like I use those push button doors with my elbow because I don't want touch door handles I want the automatic faucets that we have in our bathroom because people don't want to turn on the handles of the sink. And so thinking about all these little details that are universal design elements that you tend not to think about. Like even our front desk reception is lowered for everybody, even though the ADA says you can have higher, but you also must have a lower section. We want it universal for everybody. And so there's just a lot of those just details and automatic shades that go down that are light sensitive, motion censored lighting in all of our rooms that save energy, but also someone's not even flicking a light switch. You're just wheeling into a room, and the lights go on. We have a green roof with a beautiful rooftop patio which I was happy to host up there even though the weather wasn't great. But to be able to have like a rooftop space that an elevator goes to and a large percentage of that patio being green roof which helps with cooling of the building as well. And then downstairs, we have a parking garage with a shower and a bike rack to encourage alternative modes of transportation and people being able to think about the different ways in which they might come to the building. So there's a lot of green requirements that we discovered as we were building the building that are also universal design accessible features too.

And so now we're kind of thinking post-pandemic about what does the future of the workplace look like for people with disabilities, right? So we have our structures built universal design in green, and now we're thinking and reimagining what our internal spaces look like in a post-pandemic, hybrid world where people want to work in a more hybrid space, digital is increasingly the way we're having meetings, but how we also foster more collaboration and community building within our physical space as well.

Holly Carmichael:

And you guys did a lot of work not only for your staff to be able to access the hybrid environment from devices but also the people that you're serving too because that was just a reality in COVID.

Karen Tamley:

That's right. And that was really one of the big disparities that we saw during the pandemic was the disability digital divide and how many of our consumers just, I think much of it driven by poverty, do not have internet connectivity, do not have laptops or other devices, don't have emails, digital literacy, and how that really has closed out so many of our community members. And so we worked on a pilot program this summer where we received a small grant and we wanted to kind of test this out and evaluate it. But we were able to purchase 25 refurbished laptops and get internet connectivity for our consumers who had neither. Neither. None.

Holly Carmichael:

And many of us, probably listeners on the podcast, couldn't even imagine having no internet or no connectivity because that's how you access the world now.

Karen Tamley:

Yeah. And during the pandemic most of them were calling into meetings on the phone, right? They weren't on a screen. And so you basically saw a screen with phone number after phone number after phone number. No faces. And it was very telling to us about just how deep this digital divide is. And so we really tried to address it, and we're looking at scaling this up now. And I think as we think about going in a more hybrid way for our staff, we really need to think about how we also offer more options for our consumers to receive services from Access Living. So not just coming through our doors and maybe taking a bus or a train to get here, but how can we also offer more comprehensive services through digital platforms. But we can't do that unless people have access to the digital space. And so that's going to be a really, really important thing for us to really focus on over the next few years.

Michael Murray:

Well, and I think one of the beauties of centers for independent living, I worked for a center for independent living in North Carolina and really had my introduction to being a person with a disability from the independent living movement and walking down the street with hundreds of people with disabilities around me holding signs and saying our homes, not nursing homes and our fight for justice and equality and for the first time seeing my disability as the beautiful thing and part of my identity that it was. And independent living gave that to me. But it was because of the diversity of what you guys offer to the disability community. It's not just this one thing and this one service, but it's you're able to be flexible and meet people's needs where they are. And I wonder if you could just talk about you guys do more programs and diversity of programs than probably any other service provider that I can think of. And I wonder if you could just talk about some of those.

Karen Tamley:

Yeah. And I think you're really right in what you just said there because every center for independent living is different, right? Some of us are in urban centers. Some of us are in suburban communities. Others are in very rural parts. And so centers really need to respond to what the issues are in their communities. And while we all are obligated to provide these five core services, the types of services or the issues that we focus on or respond to may be different.

Michael Murray:

Yes. And it should be different.

Karen Tamley:

Yeah. Absolutely, absolutely. And so I think that's one of the great things about and so beautiful about the independent living movement is that we are very focused on each of our communities. So yeah, we do a lot of programming. We do direct services. We do peer support. We do advocacy and policy reform. And those are threads through different issue areas. So housing is huge because I would say housing is the number one issue, particularly in an urban area like Chicago. The need for affordable housing is just huge. It's a dire issue. It's a crisis. So we're a certified Fair Housing organization. So we do a lot of Fair Housing testing. We help people defend their rights to get access to housing. We do a lot of community organizing and policy work around the fight to get more affordable, fair, and accessible housing in Chicago. We help actively get people out of nursing homes. Unfortunately, we have a lot of work to do in our state of Illinois to really have more home and community-based services, but we are working every day to help move people out, get them set up in households to become participants in the community, and bring peer support services to them. We do a lot of policy work at the state level as well, legislative work. We have a very strong youth team where we're working on youth empowerment and transition work on helping young people with disabilities find their way, help them with things like employment or post-secondary independent living. We're working a lot in the area of racial justice and making sure that all of the work that we do has a racial justice overlay. But also, we're working actively on a lot of different initiatives to support black and brown disabled people who are a majority of the folks that we serve here in Chicago. So we're doing work around criminal justice reform. We work with immigrants with disabilities and their rights and community organizing around that. But then we're also doing policy work around education, transportation.

But again, we can be nimble and responsive, and I would say our biggest focus over the last two years was COVID, was responding to COVID, making sure that disabled people had access to vaccines, PPE, that we had policies at our state level that protected the lives of people with disabilities. So we worked with our governor's office on crisis standards of care that would protect people on the basis of disability and race when we had situations of our ICUs getting at capacity and how are we triaging who's going to get served in a way that's non-discriminatory. So we worked to get guidance pushed out from the governor's office on that as well as reasonable accommodation to visitor policies during COVID because hospitals weren't letting in Pas or sign language interpreters that disabled people need. So we worked to make sure that those were guidances that were issued to every medical facility throughout the state. We also put together probably one of the most comprehensive resource pages on COVID as well, and

that's still on our website and really from A to Z, every type of resource that you might need during the pandemic, we were putting out there and pushing out. And then we worked on really trying to get disabled people equitable access to vaccines, and we got disabled people prioritized higher on the list throughout our state. But then the work still continued around getting the word out about access to vaccines and vaccination sites and boosters. And so now we're really looking at kind of that next phase of the pandemic and thinking about long COVID and folks that are living with long COVID. There's over 400,000 people in Illinois that are living with long COVID. And as you know, President Biden talked about this and people meeting the definition of disability. And so we feel that we have an important role in terms of supporting people with disabilities in the area of any type of support that they might need even though they may not recognize themselves that they actually have a disability, right?

Michael Murray:

Right.

Holly Carmichael:

Yeah. There's maybe some disability identity work to do for long COVID folks for sure. So Karen, you talked a little bit about the digital divide. What about the economic divide that you see for people with disabilities and their experience?

Karen Tamley:

Yeah. I think that's the through line in the disability community is poverty, right? The fact that disability is a condition that can lead you into poverty and poverty can lead to disability, right? And I think that that is the one thing we really have yet to address is the economic gap. But then even on top of that, the disability racial wealth gap which is also very, very wide, very troubling as well. So that is one of our primary new strategic goals is economic justice and opportunity and figuring out how we can tackle those systemic barriers that keep disabled people in poverty, prevent them from having financial stability or wealth building things like benefit traps and asset limits and income limits that you can't save money and you can't avail yourself to other economic opportunities without the fear of losing benefits and what comes with that. And so that's huge, and the fact that we still have sub-minimum wage is illegal in many states throughout our country. Just the barriers are pretty far and wide. And so we're really looking at how can we tackle this very, very troubling economic gap, disability poverty from multiple angles from both advocacy and policy reform to remove systemic barriers but also from the individual one-on-one supports, things like credit repair and credit building and getting people banking with more mainstream financial institutions, enrolling in ABLE accounts that can support some wealth building for some folks with disabilities to thinking about lending circles as ways to build credit, right? And then also, we're working a lot with employers on disability inclusion practices. So thinking about their hiring, retention, promotion of folks with disabilities into their companies. And we're definitely seeing an increase in demands from employers wanting more support and assistance around disability inclusion practices and also, the intercept of disability and race and other communities too. And so we're doing a lot of work in that space. And then also digitally since websites and digital spaces are the front doors of many employers. Many of them are wanting support on how to make those digital

platforms and front doors more accessible. So we're doing that as well. So that's kind of our really approach that we're going to be looking at over the next several years to really try to tackle poverty.

Michael Murray:

So powerful.

Karen Tamley:

Yeah.

Holly Carmichael:

Yeah.

Michael Murray:

If folks are interested in accessing a center for independent living and all of these services that you just talked about, how can they find it and who qualifies? Because I think that's a really powerful part of centers for independent living is who qualifies for services from you guys.

Karen Tamley:

Right. I mean we serve disabled people, and that's it. We don't ask your disability type. We don't ask your immigration status. We don't ask any of those questions. You have a disability, we serve you.

Michael Murray:

And for most services, yeah, yeah, and for most services, we've got to go through such a long line and a waiting list and process and paperwork and all this sort of stuff. Right. But to say that there is an organization that just says, if you have a disability, we serve you, it's so powerful.

Karen Tamley:

Yeah, exactly. And if people are interested in finding where their local center is, The National Council on Independent Living which is our umbrella organization, on their website, you can look state by state to find the center near you. And again, we're all over the country, and we're a tremendous resource.

Holly Carmichael:

Yeah, yeah.

Michael Murray:

You are a tremendous resource, and what centers for independent living have done for the disability rights movement and for those of us with disabilities, I don't think we could overstate it. Unfortunately, and this is the issue that we're addressing today, many people don't have access to a center for independent living. There is not adequate funding for CILs in the federal budget. If you could talk to a policy maker, and I know you talk to policy makers all the time, if you could sit down with them, what would you say to them right now as it relates to that problem?

Karen Tamley:

Independent living centers are huge assets to every community, and it's an organization that, like I said, is something that everyone is going to need at some point in their lives. And the work that we're doing, whether it's direct services or advocacy or peer support, we are making the world a better place for everybody as we age, as we have family members that acquire disabilities or they age. And so people can't think of the work that we're doing as a specialty organization over on the sidelines that only serves one small segment of the population. There's a billion disabled people worldwide, right? One in four people in this country have a disability. The explosion of people living with COVID now. I think we're needed now more than ever, and we need to think forward about the role that centers for independent living play in communities, in cities, to families. And we're here when you need us, right? You may not need us over the long haul, but whether you have resources or you don't have resources, people need us. And so I think we are a huge value and a huge asset to our country.

Michael Murray:

Yes. Karen, thank you so much.

Karen Tamley:

Thank you.

Michael Murray:

Wow. What an incredible interview with Karen Tamley. She is such an advocate and has so much that she's brought to the lives of people with disabilities in our society and our community. And the work that she's doing at Access Living is just incredible. As you can see, centers for independent living play a valuable role in our society and in the service system as a whole. The work that they do around advocacy and workshops and training and for youth and for housing assistance and transportation, the list just goes on and on. They are so valuable, and I think that we demonstrated that today.

So we want to end out by giving you, our listeners, three things that you can do to have an impact as it relates to this. We do this every time, and we always start with something that you can do as an individual. What can you individually do to ensure that you're taking action after hearing this awesome interview? So the first thing that you can do as an individual is you can spread the IL philosophy. IL philosophy says that we as people with disabilities have inherent value, and we want to ensure that we're not trying to fix us but that we're recognizing that society and the environment around us, when it is changed, we can live full and productive lives in our society. And so that is a poor job of explaining IL philosophy, but I think we just did it. So let's go out there, and let's explain IL philosophy. Let's make sure that people recognize that it's not that I should be able to walk, but it's that there aren't curb cuts. That's why I can't get around. And so a recognition that the change that needs to happen is in society, and I think that that's huge.

The second thing that we always like to give to folks is how can you have a systematic impact on this issue. Well, systematically, we need more centers for independent living. In my home state of North Carolina, there are still places where you can't get access to a center for independent living. We need

additional funding to ensure that centers for independent living are accessible to everyone throughout the United States. And so we're encouraging all of you guys to go online and to check out your member of Congress. And we'll give you some links at GTIndependence.com where you can check that out. But we would encourage you to contact your Congressman. Tell them how valuable centers for independent living are, and tell them that we need increased funding, both national funding but also state funding. States can contribute to this as well. So we would encourage all of you guys to go out there contact your member of Congress, contact your local legislator, and tell them how important the independent living movement is and centers for independent living are.

And then last but not least, we always want to tell you about an organization that you can contribute to that is having a huge impact on the issue that we're looking at today. Today, it's super easy. Access Living is having a huge impact in the city of Chicago and in that region, in that area. We would really encourage you guys to contribute to them financially. We are also a contributor to Access Living and the work that they're doing in Chicago, and we encourage you to support that and to support their vision of a world where people with disabilities are respected and that it's a natural part of the human experience and seen as a natural part of the human experience. Thank you all. Thank you for being a part of the Disability Garrison. Thank you for being a part of the awesome work that we're doing and the impact that we're having throughout the world. We're grateful for each one of you.

RECORDING ENDS