



NeighborWorks America NTI Reflections
By Allison Lourash, 2018

Hello, my name is Allison Lourash, and I work assisting families navigate support and systems in Wisconsin. I am also a doctoral student and attended the NeighborWorks National Training Institute in Kansas City as part of my research interest in Asset-Based Community Development. I have previously worked in organizing around accessible, affordable housing, and it is so important to make sure disabled self-advocates are at the table to ensure physical and programmatic access. Additionally, it is important that in the age of ever-dwindling public dollars, various communities work together to harness limited funds.

At many conferences, I use my laptop and keep electronic files—both for organization and to lessen the weight that I need to carry due to spinal issues. NeighborWorks provided electronic copies on a flash drive, which was easy to access. Additionally, the app that NeighborWorks uses from Pathable was great, as it was downloadable not just on my phone but also on my computer, which is my preferred platform. It provided information on room locations, as well as general updates. The information provided ahead of time, as well as ongoing shuttle service, allowed me to focus on the content of the Institute.

The NTI was a great networking opportunity and allowed me to hear concrete examples of great work going on in communities across the country. I took courses in the Community Engagement track and engaged with professionals and residents from a variety of housing related fields. It also reinforced several strategies and approaches, including concepts from community organizing that I have found helpful. Personally, I enjoyed visiting Kansas City and learning more about the city.

The Conference Accessibility Initiative allows an opportunity to attend a conference that I might not attend due to finances but also the unknown factor of access. Knowing that organizations have partnered with WID and JPMorgan Chase makes me more open to attending conferences that I may be unfamiliar with.

Allison Lourash is a doctoral student at Walden University and a project manager for a non-profit managed care organization, focusing on providing technical assistance regarding community-based supports throughout Wisconsin. In the past, she has worked on policy issues around employment and access on behalf of Little People of America and has run state legislative internships and other advocacy programs for a Center for Independent Living.

