



Florida Housing Coalition Conference Reflections
By Cody Bowman, 2018

My name is Cody Bowman, and I live in Venice, Florida. I am a junior at the University of South Florida, studying social work. I am also a part-time receptionist at Easter Seals of Southwest Florida. I attended the 2018 Florida Housing Coalition Conference in Orlando, Florida, where, thankfully, I had no accessibility issues; I had a wheelchair accessible hotel room with a roll in shower, which is exactly what I needed.

As someone who has lived on their own for only the past three years, I feel grateful to have had the opportunity to attend this conference. I learned a lot about affordable/accessible housing for not only myself but also for others. For people with disabilities who want to expand on their roles as advocates for themselves and others, the Conference Accessibility Initiative by JPMorgan Chase and WID will help tremendously. I've become a better advocate because of this conference and the other conferences that I've had the opportunity to attend.



Cody as a Disability Ambassador

Attending this conference was important because everyone deserves to live in a barrier free environment that is affordable to them. Growing up, I never lived in an accessible home. It's not that my parents didn't care, but it's incredibly expensive to modify a home to be accessible. We just didn't have that kind of money. So I was forced to crawl up the stairs to my bedroom when we lived in a two story house. I had to get out of my chair and crawl into the bathroom because the doors were not wide enough. So it's incredibly important to consider disability when talking about fair housing.

When I first moved to Florida from Ohio in 2007, I lived with my parents. We were lucky to rent homes that were less than \$1,000 per month. My parents also had a challenging time in finding homes that were accessible to me. They had to consider such things as whether my chair could fit through doorways, whether there were steps. I had to be able to leave my home independently without them there because I work and go to school. Luckily, I moved into my own apartment two years ago. Although it is not ideal, it is within my budget because it's affordable. However, I hope in the future that there will be better alternatives to housing for people with disabilities. We need to focus less on segregation and more on inclusivity.

Cody Bowman is a junior at the University of South Florida where she is studying social work. She is also the NextGen Leaders Advisory Council Vice Chair with USBLN. In order to achieve housing that is both accessible and affordable, she has had to learn her rights in regards to fair housing for people with disabilities, and she is always looking for opportunities to learn more.