



## CBCF Conference Reflections By Bonnie Foster, 2018

My name is Bonnie Foster, and I live in Charlotte, North Carolina, a state that is going through major Medicaid, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and IDD Health Reform. I have a Clinical Psychology background, providing over thirty years of services before I became a disability advocate due to my daughter's disability of Neurofibromatosis. I am now physically disabled and dedicated my life to being an Advisory, Advocate, and Minister of the Gospel in helping others.

My being selected as a World Institute on Disability (WID) Disability Ambassador to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Legislative Conference provided me the opportunity, education, and networking accesses to become a more effective advisory and advocate. WID provided various disability and post-surgery accommodations that included non-stop round-trip tickets, airport disability services, hotel accommodations, electric scooter rental, tickets to events and programs, materials, and on-site support staff. I was even blessed to obtain ADA Special Transportation Guest Pass Services.



**Bonnie as a Disability Ambassador**

Disability is very important when it comes to the African-American population due to the lack of individuals “not” obtaining the needed services due to belief systems, stereotypes, customs, traditions, and history. It has been said, “Black Folks don’t do that. We pray. We let the church

and God handle it.” Unfortunately, in the past it was seen as not being strong or black to obtain particular types of medical treatment. This type of thinking has now fallen upon the church as a form of “negligence” on behalf of the church not referring people to other resources or treatment when disabilities are made known to clergy and its staff. Even in the church, a person must be aware to “admit” there is a problem or issue; whereas, you seek God’s deliverance yet make the referral and recommendation for help. African Americans must acknowledge it does not mean that a person is weak to have a disability.

This conference professionally and personally equipped me with an increase in necessary skills, insight, and connections to network systems, legislation, Congress, young leaders, and the various systems. The Conference Accessibility Initiative by JPMorgan Chase and WID made a significant difference for people with disabilities by 1) providing a means for those unable to attend 2) providing accessibility and accommodations that were otherwise financially impossible 3) equipping Disability Ambassadors with tools to take back into their communities and beyond and 4) exploring worldwide opportunities made available to persons with disabilities. I would only suggest that Disability Ambassadors serve a three-year term to become more effective.

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Bonnie Foster has been a disabled African-American advocate for the past thirty years during which she has fought for advocacy in the disability, mental health, IDD, and Substance Abuse realms. She has a Clinical Psychology background and a disabled adult child. When she was informed that her daughter would never graduate from school, they both began what would be a life-long fight for advocacy around the right to academic, social, economic, and general life success and equality for people with disabilities.



Bonnie as an Advisory, Advocate, and Minister of the Gospel