



## CBCF Conference Reflections By Leia Arnold, 2018

My passion has always been learning more and educating others. I was browsing the Internet one day, looking for resources for some of my students and came across the World Institute on Disability. There are hundreds of websites on disabilities, but for some reason, I found myself clicking through every link and page wanting to know more about this organization. I came across the Conference Accessibility Initiative partnership with JPMorgan Chase, and that's when I really became intrigued. I toggled back and forth on the JPMorgan Chase website, reading about their Diversity and Inclusion Office and then back to the World Institute on Disability's page, soaking in all the information. I knew I had to be a part of this Conference Accessibility Initiative and find out more about the two companies.

Disability work was nothing new to me. At the time, I was the Director of a disability services department at a higher education institution. Advocating for people like myself just comes natural; it is part of who I am. But lately, I had felt like something was missing. I spent so much time making sure students were accommodated that I didn't have time to make sure they were successful after college. Some left, after working years to earn a piece of paper in debt, without any real direction. They struggled to gain employment, so they couldn't live financially secure lives, and they struggled to navigate a system where people continued to treat them like a number. Reading the World Institute on Disability's website, I found their mission filled the holes I was trying to plug.

Personally, as someone who suffers from a non-apparent disability, going into unfamiliar territory can be daunting. You can plan ahead, but things don't always work out as scheduled. Sometimes, the wheelchair isn't waiting at the gate, or it's given to someone that "looks" like they need it more. Other times, the elevator could be getting serviced. These are some barriers that can make it difficult for some



Leia as a Disability Ambassador

people with disabilities to navigate. The Conference Accessibility Initiative makes it possible for people like me to have a seat at the table. The World Institute on Disability provided a concierge desk to handle those last minute hiccups, provided closed captioning for many of the major events, and asked for feedback throughout the conference on accessibility. During one of the sessions, a quote I hear a lot came up: “Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.” Since the World Institute on Disability and JPMorgan Chase allowed me to be a part of this conference, I was able to be that voice that corrected this quote to “Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is when EVERYONE can dance.” In order to make major changes, those affected need to have that seat at the table. Many times Disability Rights are the overlooked Civil Rights. When we are just trying to level the playing field, some see it as a crutch, an advantage or some don’t see us at all.

Finding the World Institute on Disability’s webpage and attending the conference change my life personally and professionally. This initiative took my career in a whole new direction. After reading about this partnership, I knew I wanted to be a part of the JPMorgan Chase family and help continue their mission to promote an inclusive work environment. I knew this company wasn’t trying to fill a quota; they wanted to make change. After only working in education, I left a senior position to come to Chase to be a part of a new initiative to fulfil the mission of inclusiveness. Personally, attending this conference has sparked a fire in me. I want to make sure, now more than ever, we always have a seat at the table. I look forward to attending more conferences as an advocate and panelist for disability policies and accessibility.

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Formerly employed as a director of disability services at a higher education institution, Leia Arnold now works at JPMorgan Chase in a newly created accessibility department that provides reasonable accommodations to applicants and current employees. She has spoken at various conferences and provided professional development for K-12, as well as higher education institutions. She has been an advocate for disabilities for over ten years and is especially sensitive to the double jeopardy that sometimes occurs when a person is both African-American and disabled.



Leia with some of the other CBCF Disability Ambassadors