



Prosperity Now Conference Reflections By Sara Joehnk, 2018

Could you afford an unexpected emergency? One third of Americans reported they could not! If an emergency expense of \$2,000 arose in the next month, one third of participants in a report by the National Disability Institute (NDI) said they could not come up with the cash. In the disability community, the level of financial insecurity is even higher. The NDI found that one half of participants were unable to come up with the funds. JPMorgan Chase recognizes this intersection between disability and financial security, and they partnered with the World Institute on Disability to create the Conference Accessibility Initiative. As part of this initiative, they brought four Disability Ambassador Scholars to the 2018 Prosperity Summit. The stated purpose of the Summit is to help “everyone build financial stability, wealth, and prosperity.”

My name is Sara Joehnk, and I was honored to be one of these Disability Ambassadors at the Prosperity Summit. Despite, chronic illness, I recently was able to return to work. I am now the Disability Integration Specialist at the Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council. With this background, I was immediately drawn to the Conference Accessibility Initiative. Many of today’s important questions are being discussed at professional conferences, such as the Prosperity Summit, yet people who have disabilities face many barriers to their participation at these events. The Conference Accessibility Initiative both sponsored the Disability Ambassadors and worked with event planners to provide accommodations, such as ASL interpreters.



Sara as a Disability Ambassador

Although disability affects people of every socioeconomic class, the report by the NDI shows a disproportion number live in precarious financial circumstances. The report finds people with disabilities are twice as likely to have difficulty covering expenses and paying bills. They are also more likely to be under financial stress, which is defined as overdrawing their checking account, being late on a mortgage payment, or withdrawing money from retirement. Whatever action or inaction is made by the private and public sectors to address financial insecurity, the disability community will be majorly impacted. Therefore, it is vital that our voices are included in the conversation now and not after policy is in place.

By attending the summit, I can report back to the Arizona Independent Living Council on innovative solutions being implemented at the local level and public policy solutions being discussed nationally. The conversation on financial insecurity and poverty is still only beginning, and there is much work to be done.

Source: Financial Capability of Adults with Disabilities by the National Disability Institute (2017)

Sara Joehnk is the Disability Integration Specialist at the Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council where she works on issues regarding disability inclusion in emergency management, civic engagement, leadership, advocacy, and more. She is also a volunteer executive director for a nonprofit that focuses on local advocacy and serves as a umbrella for many community groups.