

From: Administration for Community Living <acl@public.govdelivery.com>
To: Kester, Tonykester@aging.sc.gov
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Subject: A Collaborative Conversation with the Independent Living and Developmental Disability Networks of Tennessee

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A Collaborative Conversation with the Independent Living and Developmental Disability Networks of Tennessee

By Wanda Willis, Executive Director, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and Ann Eubank, Executive Director, Tennessee Statewide Independent Living Council

We asked the Council on Developmental Disabilities Executive Director Wanda Willis and Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) Executive Director Ann Eubank about the workshop and the potential impact of the collaboration of the two networks.

Why did you decide to convene this group?

Wanda Willis: With the recent move of Independent Living programs to ACL following the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, this meeting provided an opportunity for the two networks, the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Network and the Independent Living (IL) Network, to explore ways to work together to increase our impact in Tennessee. We are fortunate to have an amazing network of Independent Living Centers and a new SILC Executive Director who brings a stellar reputation for collaboration and a creative work ethic.

The meeting seemed transformational. Talk about that.

Wanda Willis: The day itself was transformational. You know, over the years the Council has worked with each organization in the room on one initiative or another. Tennessee's IL Network is a group that I personally admire – many individuals in that network have been mentors to me, shaping my vision and views that I draw on every day in my work. To see a group of organizations and individuals that I admire so greatly come together with a singular focus, mutual respect and a shared vision was truly a monumental day for me.

Ann Eubank: Another observation - it was extraordinary to see federal decision-makers, in that very same room, also be courageous. They were fully engaged and offered insight into processes at the federal level. Instead of possibly feeling overwhelmed with the recent changes at the Administration for Community Living, I was impressed by the work Commissioner Bishop and his staff have accomplished and empowered by their willingness to listen to our ideas and our challenges – to

collaborate with us.

Where do you hope to go from here?

Wanda Willis: It was clear at the end of the day that everyone was committed to continuing the conversation. The Council will be sending out a survey to get additional feedback on suggested joint projects. We will be meeting again in January to plan the next steps.

Ann Eubank: With the shared priority of transition of youth from school to work we agreed that by combining IL and DD resources and efforts in a strategic way we will significantly increase our impact on employment. We will begin work on specific activities toward this goal in our January meeting. Also, with the SILC recently becoming a member of the Tennessee Disability Policy Alliance, we join the Council and the P&A in promoting better public policy for Tennesseans with disabilities.

[Click here to read more of the conversation.](#)

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