

2021 Online KT Conference: Research Results for Policy Outcomes

Welcome from NIDILRR

Anjali Forber-Pratt and Pimjai Sudsawad

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KATHLEEN MURPHY: So, I think we can get started. As I mentioned, we'll hear first from NIDILRR's leadership, starting with Dr. Anjali Forber-Pratt, NIDILRR's new director. Prior to joining the Administration for Community Living, which is where NIDILRR is housed within the US Department of Health and Human Services, she served as an assistant professor at Vanderbilt University.

And her primary area of expertise-- she's a researcher herself-- is disability identity development. Then after Dr. Forber-Pratt, we'll hear from Pimjai Sudsawad. As I mentioned, she's the knowledge translation program coordinator at NIDILRR and our project officer and works all year. And we really appreciate her insight.

After they both present, there will be a bit of time for questions. So, Anjali, are you ready to go? You can hand off to Pimjai when it's her turn.

ANJALI FORBER-PRATT: Absolutely. I'm excited to be here. Thank you so much for the introduction. Well, I'm very honored to have recently joined the Administration for Community Living to serve as the director of the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research.

My pronouns are she/her/hers. And today I am wearing a purple shirt with a black suit jacket and really cute headphones, as I'm actually sitting in a hotel hallway.

And you see on the screen, there's a picture of me in my manual wheelchair with a black service dog on my lap. And his name is Colton, and he gets very upset if I don't introduce him to everyone. So, he is sitting here at my feet.

I tend to wear a lot of different hats, depending on the day. I am a two-time Paralympic medalist in the sport of wheelchair racing. I am an Indian adoptee. As I just said, a disabled wheelchair user, woman, person of color, a researcher, and an activist.

Prior to this role, I was on faculty for five years where I predominantly studied disability identity development. When I joined NIDILRR, there were two things that I was most excited about. One of the most refreshing parts about joining NIDILRR was being around disability researchers every single day.

And so, everyone who is here participating, the work that you do matters. And it matters every single day for Americans with disabilities and for the broader field. It was very refreshing to not have to start at square one about why disability matters in research, and to be surrounded by individuals like you all who are committed to rigorous research, and it's relevant to the disability community.

The second thing that I was most excited about is the fact that NIDILRR-- that we put significant dollars behind knowledge translation. And this has been an integral part across diverse portfolios. One of the other pieces that I am so excited to bring to this role is to continue the element of expanded disability representation and the sense of community for the broader disability and research community. These are two driving forces that I really see helping to shape my vision as director.

A little bit more about my personal background. I was adopted from India when I was two months old. And two months after arriving in the United States, I got sick with transverse myelitis, which is what left me paralyzed from the waist down. So, using a wheelchair to get around is basically all that I've ever known.

But being so young when I acquired my disability, I actually believe that everyone in the whole world had a disability, and that this was just a phase that I was one day kind of going to just outgrow. And I share this story because the power of representation is what is embodied by this.

I thought that in order to get a job, in order to go to college, in order to have a family, to do these things that we aspire to in society, I thought that I had to get rid of my disability. And it was largely in part because every adult that I encountered could walk. And so, I was just trying to piece all these things together, and that was what I had come up with.

Fortunately for me, I was exposed at a very young age to disability sport. And that's what started to open my mind into what was possible in terms of how to live life, disability and all. I also think that it's of the utmost importance-- and I was grateful to hear-- to echo some of the comments that have already been shared that we could not ignore how the experience of disability is shaped by dimensions of race, gender, class, gender expression, sexual orientation, poverty and other power imbalances. A huge mission of this administration is to work hard to combat these inequities and something that as NIDILRR director I plan to move forward.

Like many academics in the ivory tower, you hear this need constantly for bridging the research practice gap. And in my own life as a researcher, I honestly never understood why this was so hard for so many academics to figure out. The research that we do matters, but, quite honestly, people don't read peer-reviewed journals.

It matters to share this work at conferences, not just academic conferences, but conferences with the community with totally different sectors as podcasts, as blogs, as policy briefs, as illustrations, as news stories, as tweets. Knowledge translation, to me, is the heartbeat keeps the research findings alive and engages the community to be excited about research and to be a part of it, and to truly influence and inform policy that matters.

"Nothing about us without us" is a long-time mantra of the disability community. And knowledge translation is a way to embody this. And I also believe, from an equity standpoint, that we have an ethical obligation to engage in meaningful knowledge translation activities, because those journals that we publish in are behind paywalls. And so those findings don't get to the very community that we're trying to serve by our work.

Knowledge translation is also about getting rid of the academic jargon and making sure that the findings are clear and plain and easy to understand. It's the process of ensuring that new knowledge and products generated is ultimately relevant to the disability community and furthers participation in society. I want to thank our staff and my predecessors for the strong foundation of knowledge translation within NIDILRR.

And it is a central focus in our current long-range plan. And I personally will be excited to work with all of you as we begin drafting the next long-range plan soon to help us take our knowledge translation work to the very next level.

For those who don't know, also just a quick plug for narc.com, N-A-R-I-C.com-- this is a place to find all of NIDILRR grantees' work and abstracts both past and current. And I highly encourage individuals who aren't aware of this resource to bookmark it.

In closing, I just want to say thank you again for this incredible commitment for the work that you do to deliver pertinent information to our community and to influence and translate policy. At this point, I'm going to pass things over to Pimjai.

PIMJAI SUDSAWAD: Thank you, Anjali. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Pimjai Sudsawad. I use she and her pronouns. I am a middle-aged Asian woman with darker skin and short salt and pepper hair. I am sitting in front of a white screen at my home office in the Washington DC area. And I am wearing a gray-colored top today.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to the 2021 version Knowledge Translation Conference supported by our agency. As Anjali mentioned, our institute, which is housed within the Administration for Community Living in the US Department of Health and Human Services, has a strong commitment to advancing knowledge translation. And supporting this conference is one of the ways that we do it.

We also fund several knowledge translation centers to help provide training and technical assistance to grantees and knowledge translation best practices, as well as to share information and resources on knowledge translation with a larger community, as we are doing now in this conference. This is the ninth year of the conference since 2013, I believe. And the topics of past and present conferences have been chosen based on current interests in the field, as well as input from conference attendees like yourselves.

It has been a lively and informative journey, as there is increasing recognition that there are active actions that need to be taken in order for knowledge to be used as intended. And the framework of knowledge translation is an approach that can help mapping out the necessary steps, strategies, and actions to achieve that goal. New thoughts and strategies continually emerge based on our collective experiences and additional understanding of this endeavor. And that we can share and exchange to advance toward our ultimate goal, which is for the knowledge to be used to make positive impact for individuals, community, and society as a whole.

Like previous years, you will have a chance to provide input and interact with fellow conference attendees and speakers. We also look forward to receiving your feedback about the conference in

the conference evaluation. And that we would greatly appreciate you letting us know your thoughts about this conference, as well as the plan for future conferences.

We are very pleased to see growing interest and participation from colleagues both domestically and internationally, as one of the purposes of the conference is to facilitate information exchanges within the international KT community in this free forum where participants can advance their knowledge and skills in the area, as well as to have a chance to talk to fellow KT enthusiasts, so to speak. So, without further delay, I'll pass on the microphone to Kathleen, who will introduce the speaker for the first session of the day.