Reflecting on this past year has mixed emotions for me. We as individuals and organizations had to dig deep to address the ongoing stress of COVID, a national cultural evolution, and political polarization. What I have learned is that we are resilient. This is not to say it isn’t hard or that we don’t have good days and bad days. And we are persevering. As an individual, I am developing new support systems, asking for help, and learning to have more grace with myself. As an organization, we are developing new partnerships, asking how we can collaborate better, and relearning how to listen to each other, which strengthens the disability community as a whole. And it is working!

Over the past year, WASILC and disability community partners have worked closely with the Department of Health and Emergency Management Division in responding to COVID by providing valuable input regarding access and functional needs. This in turn has brought a greater understanding on how the disability voice needs to be at the table from the beginning and state government is positively responding. We hope to share more about this in future newsletters.

There have also been changes on the Council. Earlier this year we welcomed Dion Graham and said goodbye to Jana Finkbonner, Mark Leeper, and Davi Kallman. We also welcomed our newest council members who were appointed in September. They are Mona Fuerstenau, Kimberly Meck, Ricardo Funes, and Tricia Eyerly. You can read more about them in this newsletter. And most recently, we said farewell to Rob Hines, DVR Director, and welcomed Terry Redmon, Interim DVR Director. Rob has been a great supporter of Independent Living Philosophy and will be missed. Terry has a long history in the disability community and core understanding of Independent Living Philosophy. We are excited to have him representing DVR as the ex-officio to WASILC and look forward to continue a strong partnership with DVR.

*Continued on page 4
NEW WASILC COUNCIL MEMBERS

Tricia Eyerly, Dept. of Services for the Blind (DSB) Ex-Officio

From a very young age, Tricia knew that she wanted her life work to include working with people with disabilities. Although she considered being a Special Educator, she graduated from Central WA University with a BA in Psychology. Her first job after graduating was working as a case manager at a Behavioral Health Center in Yakima helping patients with mental illnesses. She helped prepare so many clients to join the workforce and find employment, that it led to her working for DVR.

She worked with DVR as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. She earned a Master’s degree in Vocational Rehab Counseling at WOU through an RSA grant program. After three years at DVR, she began working for DSB as a certified rehab counselor, then later as an area manager for Eastern WA, she has been with DSB for 20 years. Tricia said, “When you’re working with our participants, there isn’t just a quick fix, there’s a lot of counseling, guidance, and training that goes into it. You have to consider a holistic approach to assist someone to move into the world of work. What do you want to be? Let’s figure out how you can gain and maintain independence and feel successful.” She loves working for DSB because she can serve clients within the full scope of the life span. These 28+ years of helping people with disabilities to find their voice and be successful in the world have been very rewarding.

Originally from Edmonds, WA, Tricia and her husband of 28 years call Yakima home. Together they have two grown children; a 25 year old son and a 23 year old daughter. She finds great joy in outdoor activities such as camping, hiking, and kayaking.

Mona Fuerstenau, Advocate for People with Disabilities

Mona has long been an advocate for people marginalized by disability and difference. Early in her career she worked as a speech language therapist in rural Alaska and with Veterans in the Portland metro area. As the parent of two very diverse learners she developed advocacy skills navigating the public school system on their behalf. These two young adults are the joy of her life along with her granddaughter.

Through volunteer work with the local special Education PTA, regional and national faith and disability task forces and 7.5 years on the WA Developmental Disabilities Council including 18 months as acting chair Mona honed those advocacy skills even further. She strives to be an ally by creating and encouraging opportunities and making space for the voices of others to be heard. She is a huge fan of Asset Based Community Development and feels the world of disability is bogged down in deficit based thinking. She regularly challenges that status quo and hopes to impact the future by asking great questions and making strategic alliances.

Mona has lived between Washington, Oregon and Alaska all her life. Though she loves to travel and has done much, she feels the NW is the best. Except perhaps for the coast of Italy! Her favorite places always include being near water, especially an ocean beach. She is a patron of the arts, loves to read books by skillful authors, seeks great wines and dark chocolate. Mona plans to launch a new podcast called Amplify raising the voice, volume and visibility of disability in the near future.
NEW WASILC COUNCIL MEMBERS

Ricardo Funes, Advocate for People with Disabilities

Ricardo has worked in a variety of settings, from local and state government, to health care. He has worked as a case manager in a behavioral health clinic, helping individuals enroll in healthcare, and in administrative positions. He is also a master’s level social worker who has worked with houseless individuals suffering from severe and persistent mental illness and/or substance use. Ricardo currently works part time at an inpatient facility with individuals hospitalized with severe and acute mental illness to help stabilize them and allow them to return to their local communities. He understands firsthand how adequate support systems can help individuals live in their communities of choice. His work has inspired him to advocate for individuals with disabilities, both visible and invisible.

Ricardo is originally from California and relocated to Washington State in 2011 to attend the University of Washington. He holds a bachelor’s in psychology and a Master’s in Social Work from the UW. He stayed in the area after graduation because he loves Washington summers. He could do without the rain though. Ricardo lives in Olympia, WA with his partner and two cats, Limo and Sushi. Before COVID-19 shut down the state, you could usually find him and his partner at local cat shows. He admits that if he could, he would own one of each cat breed. Besides cats, Ricardo loves to collect comic books, which he plans to read one day when he is not so busy. In his off time, Ricardo loves to travel and try the best local restaurants where he visits.

Kimberly Meck, Center Directors Representative

Kimberly has worked as the Director for the Alliance of People with disAbilities in Seattle for the last six years. She has a Bachelor’s in Social Work from PLU, a Master’s in Rehabilitation Counseling from Utah State University, and is a Certified Rehab Counselor and CDMS. She served on the board of director’s for CFI for six years and is currently the NCIL Region 10 Representative. Kimberly’s three main goals for the Alliance are to: 1) Build capacity to serve more consumers; 2) Increase disability awareness within the community; and 3) Promote Independent Living Philosophy through policy. Kimberly is an active and vocal advocate for disability services, accommodations, funding, and equity. Kimberly said, “There has been one silver lining to COVID-19. There is greater awareness of the disability community, and disability voice is now at the table more than ever. We have been able to increase disability awareness, build more cross-disability partnerships, and provide technical assistance to ensure accessibility to services like COVID testing.”

Originally from Oregon, she moved to Tacoma when she was in 9th grade. She lives in Tacoma with her husband and 10-year old son. Kimberly met her husband, a talented musician, five years ago at a disability conference in Washington, D.C. Her hobbies include drawing, sketching, photography, and best of all, spending quality time with her family.
DVR INTERIM DIRECTOR TO SERVE AS EX-OFFICIO

Terry Redmon, DVR Interim Director, Ex-Officio

DVR Deputy Director Terry Redmon is serving as DVR Interim Director while recruitment for the position takes place. Terry is well versed in the Independent Living Philosophy and in the work that CILs do. Terry held a number of positions in various DSHS administrations prior to joining DVR, including Employment Partnership Program Manager for DDA, Traumatic Brain Injury Program Manager under ALTSA and Executive Outreach Manager for the DSHS Office of Diversity Affairs. Terry has over 30 years of experience working with partners on community-based employment programs for people with disabilities. He spent 15 years of his career in DVR where he has worked as a VRC, Lead-VRC, Supervisor, Assistant Regional Administrator-Region 1, and Field Chief, working as a member of the Executive Leadership Team. We welcome Terry to WASILC as Ex-Officio.

2021 Quarterly Meeting Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January 21: 9:00am—3:00pm via Zoom</th>
<th>July 15-16: Ellensburg, WA</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 15-16: Seattle, WA</td>
<td>October: TBD</td>
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DIRECTOR’S UPDATE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

BY KIM CONNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Planning for a Safer Tomorrow: Disability Emergency Preparedness Conference was a huge success, with over 300 registrants from the disability community, statewide emergency planning agencies, and disability advocacy organizations. The keynote speaker, Justice Shorter, spoke about the intersectionality of race and disability and the impact it has on all of us. It was great to hear about the work being done by our partners from Centers to Independent Living, local emergency organizations, state partners at the Department of Health and Emergency Management Division, and neighboring states, like Colorado, who have had the foresight to embed a disability coordinator within their state emergency management system.

The year hasn’t been easy but it has pushed for change and we can, collectively, continue the momentum we have gained. Be safe, wear a mask, wash your hands, reach out to others, and continue being the resilient person you are!
The transition to telecommuting has been an adventure for all CILS across the country. Over here in Spokane, we built much of our program off of in-person peer connections. Once getting the state order to social distance, there was a learning curve to say the least. However, through trial and error, I’d like to say that we have not just found our groove but are dancing better than ever.

When quarantine first started, we canceled our events. Though events were now off the table, we were able to moved all of our consumer meetings to zoom relatively smoothly, and we continued to work towards completing goals and adapting independent living plans for this new COVID-19 world. As our Independent Living Advocates took these meetings, we noticed that this was not just our only social experience outside of our household, but our consumers as well. We spoke about how COVID-19 was affecting us all and that true IL peer connection came shining through. We shared our methods of adapting and so did consumers. However, from consumer to CIL employee, there was one topic that always came up: Mental Health.

This is what started the development of our Mental Health Mondays. Starting in June, we began to meet every Monday evening over zoom. Our IL Advocates would set a topic and the group had the chance to share coping mechanisms and strategies that have worked for those in the group. Without the barriers of transportation and bus fare, we had youth across Spokane County attend these workshops. Those who could only make it to an event every so often, could show up consistently due to this new digital meeting space.

With the success of Mental Health Mondays, we made the event monthly, the last Monday of the month, and began to play with the idea of more digital group meetings. With the success of the NCIL conference, the idea of a complete digital conference solidified as a real option, and we began developing our next digital event: the Young Adult Leadership League, or YALL for short.

YALL, happening the last full week of September, gave an option for young people across the county to learn from youth advocates and share their own experiences. By meeting digitally, we were given the option to bring in speakers from all over the country at a low cost. This new digital space gave us the opportunity to share ideas that couldn’t have been shared any other way. In our last meeting, to celebrate the completion of the week, we all played games via the JackBox Party Pack. This moment of celebration gave us the certainty that we could safely bring back one of the events that DAC Spokane has hosted since its office started in 2018: Game Night!

There are still many issues to work through during these historic times. As disabled people, we know that technology is not always accessible, be it through ability or finances. These past months have shown how important high speed internet and technology are, and there is still much work to make sure all people have access to these resources. I hope that as we move forward into times that are still uncertain, we see the wins that have come from our ability to adapt, and continue this work, even when we can meet in person again.
WASILC stands in solidarity with the Black Community and all Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. We fully support the Black Lives Matter movement and condemn systemic racism, oppression, and injustice. Achieving our mission requires us to educate and advocate for systemic changes for all people with disabilities, which includes the intersectionality of race and disability. We recommit to this vital work and will hold ourselves accountable to become better allies. We know we cannot elevate the disability community without elevating the BIPOC communities we serve.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT INDEPENDENT LIVING!

We promote the Independent Living (IL) Philosophy by empowering communities through advocacy, education, and collaboration. This philosophy emphasizes the idea people with disabilities are the best experts on their own needs, deserving of equal opportunity to decide how they live, work, and take part in their communities. Learn more.

HOW YOU CAN ENGAGE

There are two ways you can participate with WASILC. You can join a committee or apply to serve on the Council. We are currently recruiting for one open council position. If you are committed and passionate about the values and mission of WASILC, you can apply here. For more information, you can either visit our website or contact Kim Conner, Executive Director, at: kimberly.conner@dshs.wa.gov.

ABOUT US

The Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC) is an eleven-person, Governor appointed council that ensures Washington State delivers Independent Living (IL) services that are community-based and consumer-controlled for all disabilities. The primary purpose of WASILC is to monitor, review, evaluate, and maintain a State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). For questions about WASILC and its mission please contact Kim Conner, Executive Director, at 360.819.0672 or email: kimberly.conner@dshs.wa.gov.

The Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP), a program of WASILC, is a statewide disability advisory group that provides technical advice on physical and programmatic accesses and effective communication strategies. Questions about CIEP and its mission can be directed to Jim House, Disability Integration Manager at 360.339.7435 or email: jim.house@dshs.wa.gov.

For general information on upcoming meetings, events, and resources, visit us at: wasilc.org.