

Ep 18 Derek and Randall_Final Cut AS

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SPEAKERS

Derek Nord, Speaker 1, Randall Owen, Matthew Wappett

Matthew Wappett 00:00

Matthew, welcome to the Developmental Disabilities Network journal, Author Insights podcast. I'm Dr Matthew Wappett, the DDNJ editor in chief and executive director of the Utah State University Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice, and it's my privilege to host this podcast. As many of you know, this podcast is one of the favorite things that I get to do. Gives me a chance to talk to many different researchers, professionals who are out in the field, making a difference and really trying to, yeah, push the world of disability in a more human direction, as I like to say. So, this podcast, again, if we go back to the very, very beginning of the journal, one of the things that set DDNJ apart was really our commitment to accessibility, trying to make sure that we had plain language summaries and that we were trying to make the information available in as many different formats as possible. And so, we created this podcast as part of that ongoing commitment to increase the accessibility of DDNJ for a wider readership. And again, I listen to more books on tape now than I read, because I'm always moving. I'm always doing something, and it's easier for me to listen to my content. And we thought that this podcast would help with that as well. So, we focus on interviewing authors and editorial board members and other folks related to the journal, so that you're getting the same content as the journal, but you don't have to sit down at your computer screen and read it or print it out and read it. So anyway, we're excited today to be doing something a little bit different. In the past, we've primarily been inviting authors to come on and to talk to us about their articles. Today, we're taking a different tack. We've invited two members of our editorial board to come on and talk about the importance of the Developmental Disabilities Network, and specifically the importance of UCEDDs within that network and a UCEDD is a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. As I think a lot of people know, things in the federal sphere have been a little bit chaotic over the last eight to nine months, and UCEDDs in the DD network have specifically been targeted for funding cuts and for elimination in some cases, and we felt like it would be really, really important to really put out some content that focuses on the importance and impact of the DD network. In fact, our upcoming special issue of the journal that will be out later this fall 2025, is completely focused on the impact of the DD network. Why is it important that the DD network be around? What does the DD network do? How does the DD network help support family members and people with disabilities and professionals who serve them in our communities. So yeah, we're excited to have a conversation today with two individuals who

have spent a good portion of their career in the DD network. So with that said, I forgot that I need to remind you, if you enjoy these conversations and if you want more, please subscribe to our podcast on Apple, podcast, Spotify, Stitcher, Overcast, Podbean, whatever you use to get your podcast and leave us a rating and a review, and please share these podcasts with your friends and colleagues. It helps get the word out, and it really helps educate everybody about what's going on in the field of disability. They really make a difference, and we would appreciate any help that we can get from you in sharing this information and specifically this podcast. In June of 2025, the Trump administration released the President's budget. That budget, although it did fund many aspects of the DD network, it did slate UCEEDs for elimination, and then it became clear that the UCEDD funding was going to be block granted to states and then states would have a discretion to do with it as they would see fit. Now these debates are still ongoing. There's been no resolution to that, but again, in the interest of really helping people understand what a UCEDD is and what do UCEDDs do within their respective states. And why are they so important to the developmental disability system? We thought we would have a conversation with two experts today. So today, I interview Dr. Derek Nord, who is the director of the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University, and Dr. Randall Owen, who is the director of the Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities at the University of Nevada, Reno. Now, I've known Derek and Randall for many years. In fact, Randall, I met many, many years ago when I was editing a disability studies text, and he was a contributor to that. That's the first time I actually had a chance to interact with them, with him. So, it's been a privilege to work with both Derek and Randall throughout my career, and I believe they both bring an important perspective to this conversation about the importance of UCEDDs here in the United States. So, by way of background, Randall Owen is the director of the Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities, as I mentioned earlier, He's an associate professor. Of Special Education and Disability Studies in the College of Education and Human Development there at the University of Nevada, Reno. He served in that role for almost five years, and his scholarly interests include inclusion practices for people with disabilities, specifically regarding students with disabilities in STEM healthcare services policy, the role of family and the employment of people with disabilities. And Randall's work really seeks to amplify the voices of people with disabilities, to ensure that they're directly included in decisions that impact them. He teaches courses in disability studies to graduate students, where he incorporates lived experience of people with disabilities. He also teaches a course on grant writing, which is, of course, key to what we do in the UCEDD network. Randall has a background. His entire background almost is within the UCEDD network. He completed his graduate studies, graduate training at the Institute on Disability and Human Development, which is in Illinois, you said, at the University of Illinois, Chicago, he earned a master's degree in disability and human development in 2007 and a PhD in disability studies in 2011 and after completing his PhD, he stayed on with the Institute on Disability and Human Development as a postdoctoral research associate clinical faculty, and eventually became the associate director there. So, with the exception of one year when he was moving around, Randall has been in the USU network since 2005 now our other guest today is Dr. Derek Nord, Dereck is a nationally recognized scholar and leader in disability research, public policy and systems change. As I mentioned, he's the director of the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, which is Indiana's federally designated University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, and he is a professor in the Indiana University School of Education. His work focuses on improving how systems support the full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in all areas of life, including education, employment, health and community living. He has a specific focus on applied research and partnership, and he's led many efforts that inform policy,

strengthen practice and remove barriers across state and national service system. In fact, Derek's work has directly informed policy discussions at the state and federal and international levels, including Reports to Congress, to the president, briefings with lawmakers, Medicaid redesign efforts and Global Initiatives led by UNESCO. So, Derek has a tremendous amount of policy experience, and specifically, I know Derek for his experience in the employment realm, but Derek and Randall both bring a wealth of, yeah, a wealth of experience in the UCEDD network, and we're excited for our conversation with them today. All right, so thank you for joining me today, Randall and Derek. Let's start off by each of you giving us a quick background on where you're at and the path that brought you into the UCEDD network, and maybe we could start with you, Randall.

Randall Owen 09:27

So, I'm Randall Owen. I am the Director for the UCEDD and Nevada work out the Nevada Center for Excellence of Disabilities. I have been here about four and a half years, and before that, I was at the University of Illinois, Chicago. There you said it's called Institute on Disability and Human Development. I also did my A graduate work there. So, I got a master's and a PhD, started in 2005 ended in 2012 and he's except for one year where my wife was a postdoc in my in the years between Chicago and here, I pretty much only worked in the network itself. Cool

Matthew Wappett 10:32

Derek, what about you? Tell us a little bit about your background and the UCEDDs you've been at.

Derek Nord 10:37

Yeah, well, I, I started in the disability field right out of college, and about in 2000-2001 went right into a vocational program where, where I was working, and just, you know, as I was looking for work at that time, I remember I kind of had this kind of crossroads moment where I had a job offer for like, a bank loan officer, or what was ultimately a direct support professional position in a pretty cool organization, and I just couldn't do that loan I went into because I get just not what. That's just not my thing. So, I jumped into the disability service space, and I had worked in that for a bit, and I stumbled across, and I worked in a really progressive provider. They were fantastic. They've been doing competitive, integrated employment since the 70s, which, that's all they've ever done. So is a really unique place, even in the early 2000s and I remember I stumbled into, I was interested in graduate school. So, I stumbled into, I found this graduate certificate that was that was being offered in at the University of Minnesota. I was in the Twin Cities, and I just, I wasn't sure what kind of program I wanted, but so I thought, why don't I just start dabbling with some graduate school stuff? And this stuff? And the certificate was implemented by the UCEDD in Minnesota, the Institute on Community Integration. And I remember the first real day I sat in the main class. It was co- taught with Amy Hewitt, the now director, and David Johnson, the past director of ICI and I just remember sitting there and thinking, you know, the conversations and just the focus of this, of this content, it was the first time it just aligned with what I had learned at this really great organization. This values base. And I just thought, this is, this is really where I want to head, both in my academic career. But also, wouldn't that be an awesome apparently, you can work doing that. So, so from there, I did a master's degree and did my field placement at ici. My master's degree was in a different university, and then did a field placement at ICI, got connected into there, doing some of the work there, through my social work field placement, and then I did a PhD at the University of Minnesota, and that was funded through ICI with Amy Hewitt, by Amy Hewitt and

Charlie Lakin and others there. And I was able to keep working there after I graduated with a PhD. And it was awesome. I just I was able to do the stuff I enjoy, really and passionate about, and be able to affect change in the spaces that I really cared about. And from there, I went and became the UCEDD director, where I am now, at the Indiana University, the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. So, I've been here for been here for about, I think, nine years, which is pretty remarkable.

Matthew Wappett 13:46

Yeah, no, that's, yeah, I remember when you moved there. Yeah. I can't believe it's been nine years.

Derek Nord 13:52

I can't either.

Matthew Wappett 13:55

So, if you don't mind me asking each of you, I'm always interested in sort of the backgrounds of UCEED directors, what were, what were each of your undergraduate degrees in?

Randall Owen 14:03

I double majored. We had sociology, social work together. Then I also did political science. Okay, it's kind of new. I liked research. Wanted to do a graduate degree. So, my graduate degree is disability and human development.

Derek Nord 14:26

I did my bachelor's degree in sociology and anthropology at St. Olaf College and then did a master's in social work at Augsburg College, and then I did my PhD in education policy and administration at the University of Minnesota. So, it's yeah, it all threads through there.

Matthew Wappett 14:47

It's interesting that you both had a background in sociology and social work. That's interesting. I guess it is becoming more and more common, but with some of the older directors. Was not a background that some of the older directors in the original UCEED system had. A lot of them were special education or rehabilitation counseling or something like that. So, yeah, it's great to see a broader social perspective,

Derek Nord 15:15

Absolutely. And I think it brings in, it gets us into different disciplines to I mean, as UCEDD, being housed within the university, and just kind of access to different students, different disciplines and different just perspectives in the work we do. I think it provides a bit more color. Of course, we're not just in those spaces in universities where many others, but I think it's we see it a bit a bit more inclusively across the university.

Matthew Wappett 15:46

Yeah, do both of you work closely with your social work programs or your sociology programs at your respective universities?

Derek Nord 15:54

I don't. At Indiana University, we, at least not with the sociology program. There's, we have some intersections, and there's some obvious overlaps, but they tend to be more academic research focused, whereas we're a bit more applied research in the field. You know, research to practice, so really informing the practitioner side of the equation? I think so. We tend to be in there. I think so. So, I say that we do have a greater affiliation with social work, and more the practitioner-based fields, social work, education, public health. So, we have a kind of a stronger relationships with those. What I would say are do or fields, you know, the fields out there, those professional works,

Matthew Wappett 16:42

yeah. What about you in Nevada, Randall?

Randall Owen 16:45

I, I fully agree that, um, yeah, I'm in a little bit of a unique situation, because my wife also works at the university, and she's actually in social work. So, we, I'm, of course, we have a personal time, but then there's a lot of professional overlap too, and later on, I'll talk about our Family Navigation Network, which is a health or family and Family Health Information Center. And my wife and I started that one together. So, it was from the start. It was a collaboration between the NCED and so for work, and we continue to build a lot of other relationships, from research to other social work practice within NCED.

Matthew Wappett 17:43

Yeah. Very cool. Very cool. Well, one of the purposes of this, of this particular episode of the podcast, actually, the next few episodes, is to raise awareness about the DD network. So, and you're the first two that I've interviewed for this series, but I'm wondering, maybe, Randall, if you could give me a quick overview of what the DD network is, including like DD councils and P&A's and why that's important to the US disability system.

Randall Owen 18:13

Sure. So, all three members of the network were kind of established by the DD Act and so those are the UCEDDs So we're both from UCEDDs, you know, we are the link between economics and kind of practice on the community. Do a lot of research generation, information sharing, dissemination, that kind of stuff. We also have a lot of experts within all of our UCEDDs that do community services. Then we have state protection and everything. So, we call them P&As. They are kind of the legal focus behind everything related to DD, and also a lot of community, included in Olmsted, they've worked but also looking at how states are implementing other laws, and they're doing those effectively, and then communicating some things that UCEDDs, could then pick up on with what they find. Then we also have the state duty councils, so they are part of they're all associated with the state agency, and they kind of do a bunch of different things, but they work more on a systems level, at least here in Nevada that has been there, they're kind of focused, so they look at how to include people with developmental disabilities across the lifespan, and kind of what the. The gaps are in the policies and systems in the state. And again, they provide really good information, both to the P&As and to the UCEDDs, to kind of fill in some of those gaps. So, all three of those centers work together. We like to think of them as a kind of a three-legged stool. We all work together. If one goes away, you know, stool falls over. So at

least, in my opinion, if we don't have all three of those centers, working together, the DV Act doesn't work the way that it's supposed to.

Matthew Wappett 20:43

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Well, you've both, as we've talked about, worked at different UCEDDs over the years, and you kind of mentioned this Randall in your response there, but Derek, in your opinion, what makes UCEDDs unique and an important part of that federal DD network?

Derek Nord 20:59

It's that's a good question. I think the you know, when I think of the DD network, I first, I kind of take a step back to think about the history, and because I think that history is real today as well, kind of why the genesis of these, of this network really coming in, coming to fruition around the time of great institutionalization of this, of this population of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, lack of opportunities, education, work, just general community participation. I mean, so this was, you know, in the 60s when these ideas started to germinate. It was, it was a different time, though, I would say these are still challenges that we, we, we experience in our communities today, for people with intellectual developmental disabilities at the same time back then, you know, family members, they just, they lack services. There was a lack, you know, just a general system, a service and support system to help their children, adults or young, be able to participate and live in the community. So, I say that because that was in the 1960s that kind of brought us into the initial part of the DD Act in the 1970s but those same issues are here today. So, when I, when I think about what was the role then, and what is the role now, it hasn't, it hasn't really changed. You know, if you think about the role of Higher Education universities in in our states and the country overall, the role is to better understand problems that are happening, to find solutions and create new ideas that can help solve those problems. And then I think what's unique about UCEDDs is these are things we do. And then on top of that is, how do we get those then solutions and those ideas into the community, into practice and scaled up to better to most effectively serve and support this population, for the to be able to achieve the rights and, or, you know, embrace their rights and see their rights through and have access to education and jobs and be able to participate in inclusive communities. So, so when I think of the role of universities, and just UCEDDs specifically, it is really that it's, it's to get these ideas, but then to turn these ideas into action in their communities. And how do we do that? I, you know, I think it's fairly well known that you said to do research, training, technical support, consultation and dissemination. So I think a lot of times there's this misnomer that universities are or that because we are in a university, we're in this kind of ivory tower out here, but kind of disconnected from the actual communities that we hope to impact, whereas my experience with you, the UCEDD I've worked at, but also my colleagues, and what I know of them, is they're very much hand in glove in the community. So, it's, how do we take this research and help bring the community along and being part of the community to make these changes. So, it's we really serve as this kind of leap, this bridge from this stodgy University type environment to getting those ideas and practices into the community for everyone to benefit from. And I think that's for people who know and have worked with UCEDDs that we do that, I think, collectively, very well, and those are what, that's why. You know, like in Indiana, we've trained 100,000 people last year, we've done a number of research studies. So, it's, it's pretty remarkable what, what you're able to do then.

Matthew Wappett 24:53

yeah, yeah. Well, in each you said, is different, in what it focuses on and what it does, kind of based. Based upon the needs, the needs in the state. Both of you, having worked at different UCEDDs, probably have a sense of how those shift and change. So, I'm curious about what issues each of your respective UCEDDs focus on in terms of research, training and service. And I don't know, maybe we can go back to you, Randall, what? What are some of the areas that you're primarily focused on there in Nevada?

Randall Owen 25:23

Yeah, so we, we actually do a lot of systems work with schools. So, we run grant programs that we call, you know, the field calls Multi-Tiered Systems Support, kind of bridging that psychology, BCBA background with more positive approach to those services. So those are some of our biggest programs. There are 17 counties here in Nevada. We work with 14 of them. Interestingly, one that we don't work with is the kind of where we're located, but we have a really big impact in terms of our reach, just because of being able to reach so far across all the counties that kind of work has historically been, what are UCEDD has focused on just because we're not College of Education. Over the last five years, we've really branched more into the family space, so working more directly with families, helping support them through everything from transitions to navigating through healthcare spaces just doing some education with them about what disability is, and we've been looking more closely at our research and inclusive research, and how we can work with people with disabilities to get them involved in research and also make sure that they're included in other spaces. We were doing a lot of work in STEM education for students with disabilities on campus. That grant has unfortunately been discontinued by National Science Foundation. Actually, there are two of them, but, but that is work that we would very much like to get involved in again. And the other thing that we're pretty well known for, at least on campus, is we have a very nice, inclusive post-secondary education program, a two-year certificate program for kids who have intellectual developmental disabilities. Think we have 20 students and 19 or 20 students who will be enrolled in the fall. So that has really grown from about eight students four years ago to 20 now. So, making some pretty good inroads there.

Matthew Wappett 28:17

Yeah. So, being in the West, how much of your work focuses on rural issues?

Randall Owen 28:24

Oh, a lot of it does, just because Nevada, like I said, 17 counties, two of them are urban, right? So, us in Reno, and then Clark County, where Las Vegas is, and everything else is a rural county or frontier. And I mean, coming from Midwest, you know, I spent the majority of my time in Chicago, in those surrounding areas, I just could not fathom what a rural county was like. So, one time, my staff told me, you have to make the drive from Reno to Las Vegas, and it was such an interesting experience, because you could go an hour without seeing a house or another car. It's just a lot of high desert area. So, the fact that we work with 14 school districts. So, we have staff across the state. We have some staff that live really in every corner state. Being able to have that flexibility to get out there and work in those communities and have people living in those communities really helps them understand the issues that those schools are going through.

Matthew Wappett 29:46

Yeah, absolutely. Thanks, Derek, what about you? What about in Indiana? What? What specific issues do you focus on there?

Derek Nord 29:57

Yeah, we, you know, we, we. Do a lot of work here in our state. I know many UCEEDs where all, all of us kind of vary in the kind of scope, or the quantity of kind of in state versus national work. The majority of our work is in state so and it's really serving, or it's really working through a number of the systems that people with disabilities interact with, be it vocational rehabilitation, education systems, early childhood systems, corrections, you know, health systems. So, we're, we're in all of these spaces, I think some of our biggest pockets of work, you know, we have, we have six different centers housed within the institute, and those centers each focus on different either areas of the lifespan or topical areas, kind of cross cutting topical areas. So maybe I'll just talk about those, because I think they all kind of indicate where a lot of our work is happening. Our first center, really is our early childhood center, and it's, you know, as the name suggests, it's working in what we call First Steps program, as well as child care settings and working with professionals and families about best practices in working with children with disabilities that are, you know, Birth to Three, birth to four, typically. And then we have a center for education, lifelong learning. And that one, that center focuses, really, on that K 12 service, system of education. And, you know, we tend, I think there's a big assumption that, because we're the Indiana Institute on Disability, that most of our work is in special or all of our work is in special education. And the reality is, a good chunk is but it's also in general education. As you all know, it's educated people with disabilities, including intellectual developmental disabilities, they are in all aspects of the education system, and I don't we as an institute can't afford to be in one or the other. We feel like the needs are just so high in both. And our hope is to continue pushing systems to do a better job, including people with intellectual developmental disabilities in the general education system. So, it's that's a really important kind of piece of our work. And then we have our Center for Community Living and careers that really hits on that transition to adulthood space. And a great deal of their work is really around employment, particularly competitive, integrated employment. We do a lot of benefits counseling, and a great deal of work in the employment space, both advancing policy, doing research, we also do quite a bit of training across these areas. And then we have what I would call cross cutting centers. And it's we have an Indiana Resource Center for Autism. We get some state dollars to have this Autism Center that really focuses attention to on the topic of autism, to really help our state focus on providing and getting families and people with autism proper information and resources in their communities. And we have what we call the Eppley Center for Parks and Public Lands. That's, this is one of our newest centers, and its focus is really around, as the name suggests, parks and public lands. And it's, it's a center with a long history, but that history I'm working to kind of evolve that centers increase its focus and the park spaces. Because, you know, I think in the disability space, we talk about some of these huge topics of employment, of education, and they're all they're very important. We all know that. But oftentimes what we neglect, or we spend less time on, is talking about where people recreate and engage with the community around them. And one of those big areas in every state is really around parks. So, we do this is, again, it's a center that we've we are evolving into to address more effectively address disability stuff. So that's pretty exciting. And then our last center is called the Center for Collaborative Systems Change, and that does a lot of evaluation, working with different state, you know, county government, state government, to do to support them in their systems change efforts and through evaluation and other research and kind of convening practices. So, so it's a, it's a

great you know, I think, like many of us, part of what we do is we, we pursue work as funding becomes available, and sometimes that funding becomes available because of the work that we've pursued and helped kind of we've helped, not necessarily create, but because of the changes that were also in our community. Community that we're trying to support and advance to further, further the opportunities. So, it's, it's a pretty, pretty diverse year by year kind of funding arrangements that we have and you know, what you do one year looks different than next, but I think what you have is that kind of under underlying values of what we do that really push, push our work. So,

Matthew Wappett 35:25

yeah, well, and I think that's one of the things that people don't understand about the UCEDD network always, is that, you know, we're always hustling. We're 90% grant funded in most cases. And so, it's really, we go where the opportunities are and where the needs are and that shapes a lot of the direction that our UCEDDs end up going,

Derek Nord 35:48

Yeah, and, you know, I think on that, I think that's a really important point, I think in this moment of kind of political, kind of assessment. So, I'll just call it that there. You know, what we do isn't to pursue stuff for my academic interests. It really is to pursue work that is to serve the communities and the state. Be at the state, the locals, the local community, the local school districts. It's really to serve the communities that we work with hand in glove, and I think that's the that's a really important thing that is difficult to understand. You know, when you read the legislation, when you read when you read a website, but we really are serving these communities and groups and populations in a manner that is meant to be really culturally and context specific to help them achieve kind of the goals that they that they have. And I think I would say that's a pretty common attribute of every UCEDD, regardless of where and how the funding comes into us.

Matthew Wappett 37:00

Yep, yep.

Randall Owen 37:02

I think that ability, no camera was talking about like the leveraging of funds, is such a such a unique part of the UCEDDs. So, I would say we're probably one of the smaller UCEDDs, but we take our grant funding and turn it into a million dollars in operating costs every year. So, I mean, that's something like one for every \$1 that we get from federal government. We turn that into \$14 of services for, you know, people across the state of Nevada, like, that's pretty good return on investment. So, I really like to highlight those things.

Matthew Wappett 37:48

Yep,

Matthew Wappett 37:49

Yep, absolutely.

Randall Owen 37:53

So, if you if you don't mind that one, now list them a couple of other projects. Go for it. Yeah, absolutely. So, people don't think I'm leaving them out but dear did a really nice job of laying out his centers, kind of in the process of organizing centers around us, but I didn't want to leave out. We do a lot of work with assessments, so we have a whole team that's kind of based off of the School of Medicine that does autism and other neurodevelopmental assessments. We are one of only two places in the whole state that will do those for free. So that's a huge benefit to the human community. We have some pretty big, long standing assistive technology programs so people can come and try assistive technology, see what works for them, see what doesn't. Take it home, use it. And then when they are set on one, come back and our staff will help them with financing. You know, find a place they provide those services to them. We also do a lot with the echo map. Also, our school in has a large echo hub. We are helping turn that into not just the medical resource but doing more and more education that goes out of it. So, one of our programs is assistive technology in a special education setting. So, we work with students are students and teachers alike. So, we have run a very large echo project of six different sessions that was probably one of the highest rated echo sessions. We've done. So we want to keep doing more and more work like that, and we do a whole lot of just work with families, on parenting techniques, teaching them they're usually from families that have been involved with the justice setting at some level, but then some other people that haven't been court mandated and just want to learn for their own benefit, so we teach them range of different skills folks and different stage of the life course. So yeah, those are, that's another one of our long-standing projects that has been going on for about 15 years now.

Matthew Wappett 40:51

Yeah, and so the autism piece that, when you both mentioned this, and I don't think a lot of people are aware, and I don't know, I'd be curious, Derek about in the Midwest there, here in the West, UCEDDs are sometimes some of the only places where families can go to get an autism diagnosis. And I know that's the UCEDDs I've worked in, in Idaho, Alaska, here in Utah, we've been some of the primary diagnostic it sounds like you are too Randall, at least for right low income or families who maybe don't have access to other resources. Do you do autism diagnoses out there too, Derek?

Derek Nord 41:27

We don't right now, but we are starting to look into it, because there is just such a dearth of places actually being able to assess so. And I think for the audience, I think it's important, why is why is it important to be assessed? If you have autism, to be assessed well upon, you know, upon getting assessed, you may be able to get a diagnosis that qualifies you for certain programming, such as special education programming. So, I think, you know, it's a core piece for a lot of people, for their kind of journey, their support journey. It's a really important piece. And what we're finding is there are these huge gaps in the state and even if we had, you know, even if we have, we have a couple in our in our local community here in Bloomington, but there that can do assessment, but they're so backed up that people can't get into to get an assessment. So, there's a real need. So, we're trying to figure out what is our role in that? Is it to start a new place to do that assessment or is it to start to really lean into building greater capacity so we can get more people starting to do assessment in our communities. But, you know, I think similar to you all, you know, we have pockets of some highly dense, densely populated areas, but by and large, Indiana is a really rural state. Most of the counties are pretty rural. So, so access to services and assessment services, autism diagnostic services are, you know, it's, it's limited,

and it really depends on where you live, and then I think, kind of tied to that is, then there's other services to, like, behavioral type services or other therapies or interventions and, and not even just autism specific, but, you know, well beyond that. So, it's, we're, we're right now take doing an assessment of, like, what role are we going to have in these, you know, if you were to call them deserts, these kind of service, support deserts. And I think so we're really right now kind of grappling with that,

Matthew Wappett 43:34

yeah, yeah. And it's a continual, it's a continual need. I mean, it's shocking. Autism has been around for a long time, 50 years, really, if we go back in the research, at least being identified as autism, but we still don't have the infrastructure to really help support and diagnose and, yeah, give families what?

Derek Nord 43:54

And I think, and Matt, I think, I think, I think what's unique about UCEDDs in this, in this space, and I, you know, the what I just said about us assessing, I think it's part of our common you know, this isn't a new This isn't like a new moment for the UCEDD, to have to assess what they do again, I think we've kind of talked about it here. Assess what we do, look at what the community needs are, and then evaluate, are we? Are we meeting these? And if the answer is no, how do we do that? And I think, you know, I've been here for nine years, that's what we do. But that didn't start with me, that definitely, and it didn't start with my predecessor. It's just the nature of what all of these centers are meant to do again. It goes back to that evolution. You know, what we do today? It what's common across these decades, is that we are that we assess the community's needs, and I don't just mean the geographic community, but I mean the population, the families, and really assess their needs to help and listen to them. So, then we can start changing our practices, and then the systems around to evolve. To meet those and I think that isn't some that that hasn't changed since 1970 when the DD Act really started. What's changed is the services that we've really worked to build capacity and then we find new information and new data and new interventions, and we need to keep doing that evolution. So, we really do work hard and leading that hand in hand with community. So,

Randall Owen 45:26

I think one example of kind of what Jared was talking about, and it relates back to this autism assessment, is like, if you want to get an assessment, and you're up here in northern Nevada and one of the rural counties, it could be a six hour drive to come in here to Reno, and then it's six hour drive back after a couple hours of assessment. You know, like most families, don't have that time available. So one of the things that we've been doing is kind of sending out people, when we go to health fairs and community fairs around the state, somebody who's trained well enough that they can do a screener and they can rule out autism right away, or they can say, you know, I think maybe you need to come into the clinic and do a full assessment, but those kind of things help us see a whole lot more people have a bigger reach, and also save a lot of time for families that otherwise would have driven in for an assessment that don't need to do it. Because, yeah, and we can then refer them to other resources they might need, but we can save them a full day or two trips. So just that mobile, mobile kind of situation, is one of the needs that we identified, and so that's been one of the ways that we addressed it.

Matthew Wappett 45:26

yeah, yeah

Matthew Wappett 47:03

Yeah, and that probably makes a huge impact for some of those families who live in those rural, remote areas. So, we've talked about kind of big picture UCEDDs and the projects in the areas that you focus on, and we've talked about how lots of different project's flow through these UCEDDs and they change from year to year. You both spent a career in the UCEDD system. What maybe take a little bit of time here to describe one or two projects that you've worked on over your careers, or at your current UCEDD that have made a measurable impact on the disability community. Not that anything we've talked about doesn't I mean, I think we can clearly see some of those. But are there any that stand out to either of you, or I don't know, Derek, do you want to go for go first on that?

Derek Nord 47:51

Yeah, I'll jump in. And maybe, if you're okay with it, Matt, maybe rather than talk about one, like discrete project, maybe I can just talk about kind of a focus area that had multiple projects flowing through. Okay, that would be totally fine. Yeah. So, my, my particular area of interest, or of passion in it, like as, as I kind of alluded to at the beginning, is has always been around employment, and particularly competitive, integrated employment. I just, you know, in my in my early career, I saw what was possible. I also saw a lot of the barriers that that people experienced and the barriers, you know, I want to make sure that it's clear for the audience, when I say barriers, I don't mean barriers that the persons that are of the person, the person with an intellectual developmental disability. Most frequently, the barriers that I saw were environmental. They were the community. They were the service system. They were professionals and have low expectations, or family members unwilling to allow their child the opportunity to work in the community. So, I and it doesn't mean that folks don't have challenges, but I think as a vocational provider, I really felt my job is to kind of unlock and find their find their strengths, and really figure out how to make that, turn that into a job, and help them do that. So as I got into my work at the UCEED, that was a really passionate area of mine, and it continues to be so through that time, that at that time it was at the University of Minnesota, a lot of my I worked really hard to kind of every project, or almost every project I had, I tried to fold in an employment element to it. So, I do a lot of data analysis, I do a lot of survey research, things like that. So, I, you know, as I was getting grants or I was working in partnership on different projects, I would try and find ways to integrate this, this really important topic, and to better understand it. Because I felt that in order to make changes, we needed stronger evidence that showed, and I might kind of operate. Theory was the systems that that we have that are meant to support people are oftentimes the system are oftentimes one of the biggest barriers that we have. Some of the policies that we have are oftentimes some of the biggest barriers people have to overcome. It isn't their disability; it's the policies or it's the service provision. So, I focus a lot of attention on that kind of systemic research, and I should, I should up front here. I am not the only person that's focused on this. There's, you know, in all of these spaces, all of these topics, there's a community of people with disabilities, of family members, of professionals, of researchers. So, I do feel like we all contribute our part. And I felt like I had something I could share with that. And this was at a time when there was pretty active policy, kind of changes happening around the country. So, another area of particular interest of mine is using technology as a mechanism to get data in the hands of people, get data and information in the hands of people on the ground who want the changes, and

particularly people with disabilities, advocates, and make it usable. Like I can do research, I can do all this stuff, but if people can't understand it or use it, they'll people will put be able to put it into action. And that doesn't, that's not just people with intellectual developmental disabilities, that's the community writ large. So, so I started to kind of weave these things together, and, you know, providing policy documents, advocacy tools, and with this broader community with a foot that had a laser focus on employment and employment rights of people with intellectual developmental disabilities, and advocacy there came a wave of change around things like employment. First, policy changes to the workforce, Investment Opportunity Act. Again, those are not my like. That isn't my impact. It's many, many people's impact over decades. But again, that's what I was hoping to affect and, you know, I came to Indiana, continued that work, and we've do a lot of that work at the UCEDD. And Indiana is about to shut down their sheltered workshops in the next six months. They got employment burst. Policies that are, they're really working again to, or some of these systems changes that I just been so passionate about, again, I just can't reiterate enough, not because of me, but it a small part that I've been able to contribute to, and it's been, it's been a thrill. And I think that, you know, I think there's a lot of stories in the UCEDD Network of people with similar passions in different areas that really are working within the broader community and advocacy and self-advocacy communities to play the roles that we can play, to keep moving ahead, to embrace, you know, folks rights.

Derek Nord 48:44

yeah, yeah, no. And I, and I appreciate that focus on collaboration, because I think, you know, one of the things that you said to do better than a lot of organizations is right bring together tons of different stakeholder groups and really help coordinate some of these efforts and help move some of these initiatives forward. I know that here in Utah, we couldn't do the work that we did without our various partners, I mean, and that's, I think that's a really important focus on,

Derek Nord 51:41

yeah, and I do think that, like I think about, you know, what, what skills can I bring to the table? And the thing is, we all have these. We all have different skills. And I think once we I once we realize that we can all play a part. And I truly do mean all and I when I say that includes people with significant disabilities, it we everyone can contribute. And I think values wise, it's what we try really aim to do. We can provide our part. You know what? Research isn't, isn't the most important thing. It really isn't, but it is an important piece. Evidence is important, but so are stories, and so is advocacy, and so, you know, and so are practices. So, I think all of these things together, you really need a team, a community around you, and that's what we have. We're obligated to do, and I think we do it pretty darn well. So, and I don't mean just in Indiana, but I think the UCEDD network as a whole

Matthew Wappett 51:41

yeah, yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So, Randall, what about you? What are, what's a project or two that you've worked on over your career that has made a big difference that you've seen?

Randall Owen 51:59

Yeah, I think my answer will kind of go along with what Derek was saying. For me, like it's more of an overall theme like and the theme, I think, is really including the voices of people with disabilities in whatever evidence bases. Probably, in some ways, I'm a bad academic, because I don't have a

trajectory. You're right. I've worked everywhere, from health care to like, you know, welfare to work and things employment kind of things civic engagement. You know, I run kind of the gamut of things, but what I keep coming back to in all my work is just elevating the voices of people with disabilities in the work itself, I never really thought of myself as a qualitative researcher. I was much more into numbers, statistics, surveys whenever I did my graduate work, but then I found myself more and more just gravitating towards there's got to be qualitative aspect to this. I remember my first large project after I finished my PhD was when I was at the USC in there UCEDD there it was around the Medicaid transition from the traditional kind of fee for service Medicaid into more of a managed care setting. We could look at all the data we want. We could analyze server results for blue made the transition. We could look at health service utilization data. What was really interesting was when they started to touch people who went through the whole transition and see what barriers they faced. That kind of information was so unique, and I think it did make an impact. It helped other states make that transition later on and know what to really focus on when it came to what quality measures they're going to look at. I've Yeah, I really think that kind of work is what makes everything worth doing, for me is just hearing from them, hearing in their own words, what they're experiencing, and then trying to develop some solutions to how do we make those barriers less and easier for people to manage? The way through?

Matthew Wappett 57:21

Yeah, in the way. And the one thing I hear both of you saying is that a lot of this work is not, you know, an independent sort of project that you're doing alone, right? These are, these are large projects that focus on systems and that really try to humanize these systems that we work within right raise the voices of those who are actually impacted by them, and make our systems, hopefully a little more flexible, accommodating and human in the long run, which I think is an aspect of UCEDD work that's often overlooked, is just that importance of that, that lived experience and that voice of the people who are directly impacted and people with disabilities live within a massive bureaucratic system. It's not always human. Oh, well, so what do you see as the greatest existential threat today to the DD network, Randall. Do you want to take that one first?

Randall Owen 58:37

That's really a difficult one to answer, but I just see it mostly as in this threat of funding that we're all experiencing now, like being able to lose our core, which, you know, for us, and I think for many other you said, it's just kind of removes that infrastructure piece. So without a core, I would lose a lot of my admin assistants, you know, all the people who kind of form the structures of things that we can pay for granted that let our PIs go out there and get the grants they want to get, and do the work they want to do, just removing those kind of support pieces and not giving people the flexibility to pursue the funding they want to pursue that That, to me, is a huge threat and as for UCEDD specifically, but I think it's going to impact the whole network, like I said before, like we all work together. If one of us falls down, I'm not sure what's going to happen to the rest of the network. I think that one of the. For us that's out there just people don't really know that the network exists, just because we are not all states, but some states function very smoothly. It's just very efficient in other states, you know, people just aren't aware of the fact that we all work together. So, I think just getting some information out there and like we're doing spot guests, and emphasizing the importance of the whole network, I think, is really necessary, because people don't know we exist. And obviously we have other threats out there. We have tests and Medicaid, which are now for from us, for a lot of people in the space, but the work that all the use adds

and all the do networks do support, you know, Medicaid advocacy efforts and reforming those whole systems. So, I think losing what I think is a relatively small piece, you know, with the DD Act partners, they're, they're much bigger things that at play here, but we play a very essential role in those larger things. So, I think losing out on us would, it's going to make a bigger impact than I think people even now.

Matthew Wappett 1:01:28

Yeah, so Randall brought up the core grant, and we've referenced it a couple times through here, and I'm going to spring this on you, Derek, can you explain the core grant and what that, what that is for a UCEDD

Randall Owen 1:01:44

yeah, that's, yeah, it's important to because it's not everyone. It's not clear to a lot of people. So, so every, every year, well, every five years, each UCEDD, has to reapply for what we lovingly call the core grant. It's the it's the federal dollars that comes from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, for us to implement our programs, or university center programs, that the intention the federal the intention from the federal government is that those dollars can serve as an infrastructure programmatic dollars, but they're meant to not just be dumped into a single program or into a single idea. It's meant there. Those funds are meant to be leveraged. And what that means in our world is we take that, that relatively low amount of funding, which is, it is substantial. It's 600 about \$600,000 every year, and we are meant to take that money and use the at least, how we do it in Indiana, we invested in some of our infrastructure so our institute can better serve by seeking, seeking other dollars in the community, other grants and contracts in in our communities to then serve the community. So, for us. And I think, you know, Randall had mentioned the idea of, you know, you for every dollar that the feds put in so much comes to a state that's the that's the underlying idea of this leveraging. It's, it's meant to provide, help us, provide foundational funding that then allows us to really, really grow and build the service systems, or, I'm sorry, support the service systems, do research training in the communities, and serve them, not necessarily with those dollars, though some can happen, but it's through other than dollars. So, we do a lot of leveraging in Indiana. And I actually that's the one thing that you said networks do remarkably well. I think every year, about 43 million in federal dollars goes to fund. 67-68 UCEEDs, and, and that's a that's a small, small relative, though it's large, 43 millions. Nothing you know to shake your head at, but it's, it is relative to the federal government. It's a minuscule amount of money. But then the types of services, the amount of services and that are brought to states through that is multiplied, you know, 10 plus fold. It's pretty remarkable what folks are able to do in their in their communities. So, you know, back to your question about existential threats. I think, I think Randall is right. 100% about funding, it is a really critical piece, because when you take away these, these, these funds that are able to fund infrastructure of an. Organization that allows you, then to get your arms and staff, and you know you're out into the community, to do the work. It allows us to focus a lot, great, all of our effort in that, and by taking that away, it will, it will harm the network entirely, but it will also, I think, I think it will even disproportionately hurt some states more than others. And I think so. I think that's troubling to me, and I really do think that many, many states would be harmed dramatically by taking that away. All states will be harmed dramatically, but I think some would be harmed even, even more so because of some of the needs and the programs that are being operated through the UCEDD. So, I think that would be, I just want to reinforce what Randall said. I

totally agree. I think a couple other things that really strike me as existential threats, and it's somewhat related, at least, kind of related to this, this point in time, I think one that that we don't talk about, I shouldn't say we don't talk about. I think we as a community have had these conversations. We are a political entities. Our job isn't to serve any one group, because disability is an a political topic. It doesn't matter what your politics are. It doesn't actually, it doesn't matter your race, your politics. It crosses all demographics. And I think our job isn't to identify the specific groups and pockets that we're willing to work with. Our job is to work in states, to work with people, their families, their the communities, professionals, to improve the outcome, help to help advance and improve the outcomes of people with intellectual the lives of people with intellectual developmental disabilities. That doesn't have a political angle. It is really about everybody. And I think that is something that's, I think one of my fears is, and, you know, I don't know how real this fear is. Is that that you said, and I'm not thinking that we as a as a community, are politicizing ourselves. I don't. I think we all do a good job of serving the communities that we serve, and we take that very seriously. But I do fear that there is a politicization of you, of UCEDDs, because we are within universities, and universities are very highly political moment right now. So I just that that's a concern, a concern that I would have out there, but I think it's one that we and I just reiterate, is one that we across the network take very seriously, because people with disabilities, it doesn't matter to us as a network, we have to serve the communities hard stop.

Matthew Wappett 1:07:49

It makes me want to jump into the whole conversation about identity politics and the war on identity today, and the fact that right disability pursued an identity politics, sort of a sort of an approach. Since the 80s and the war on identity politics, we've kind of gotten lumped in with some of those, some of those DEI and other initiatives that are being targeted today, unfortunately, from a partisan perspective. But you are right. You know, whether you're in a Republican state, a democratic state or Vermont, your disability affects everybody, and it doesn't matter what political party you belong to, it's going to impact your lives. And I do think you know, as you brought up, Randall, you know, a lot of people aren't aware of the DD network, and I think a lot of that is just the way that we approach disability. People don't think about disability. People think they're indestructible, until all of a sudden, they're faced right with a child with a disability, or they acquire disability, or they age into a disability, and all of a sudden disability is very, very real. And, you know. I think the DD network is a, is a remarkable resource for folks when they do finally recognize, oh, this is an aspect of my humanity that I have to pay attention to.

Derek Nord 1:09:12

yeah, you know. And I think this was a that was a topic in my head, also kind of thinking of threats. And it's really a threat that I think we, we in the network have maybe created, and that is, we are. We do not do a, necessarily a good job of looking at what we've done and communicating that out because, because it for one that's not the that's not why we do this work. We're not doing it so we can prop ourselves up. We're doing it to prop up the communities that we're working with, and I think so. I think that's a really important thing for us all to acknowledge and recognize, because our story matters, and the role that we played in in just about, I'll just speak for the Institute in every Disability rights movement that has happened here in Indiana, from the institutionalization special education it, we have been at the forefront of it, and that is a pretty common for UCEDDs in every state. And I say that because it's not something that we talk about. It isn't something that we're that everyone necessarily knows, and we don't expect people to, but I do think it's one of those when we don't share our stories and remind

people the role we play. There is this kind of possibility that you can be kind of taken for granted because people just don't know. So, I think, I do think we probably need to highlight that and be a little more, a little more kind of thoughtful of how we're helping the community see the role that we played in that. I say that as I say that, though it makes me kind of recoil, because that's just not the nature of the work that we do. So, I'm not entirely sure how to manage that, but I think it's a real this is one of those points in time, though, where it's really important, and when legislators, or, you know, a senator, representative, says, oh, I didn't know, who are you guys? What do you do? That's a problem. That's a problem.

Matthew Wappett 1:11:10

Yep, it is. We're not good at advocating for ourselves or self-promoting at all, but so in this moment, and we've, I know in the UCEDD community, at least, we've had a lot of these conversations, how can listeners get more involved in advocating for the DD network and other disability related programs? Randall, you brought up Medicaid and other current threats that disability programs are facing. How can listeners get more involved in advocacy?

Randall Owen 1:11:40

Well, I think the main thing people can do is just do that education piece, make sure people know about us. Make sure they know, like if people have been impacted by one of our programs, make sure people are aware not and want to say people, I mean specifically your congress people. So go talk to your representatives, go to senators, have a meeting, make sure they know that you've been impacted by, you know, a UCEDD program, even if it wasn't directly funded by the UCEDD, if it was part of the UCEDD, it was impacted by that core funding that's so important. So, make sure to have those meetings. Sending testimonies. Sending stories of how the anything to do with disability has impacted your own life, you know. Send in stories about Medicaid, if you want. And I definitely encourage people to send in stories about Medicaid. But from where I'm sitting right now, I'm very interested in continuing to use that funding so that we can work on Medicaid together as a network moving forward like I think that network is, to me, is the crucial piece of just making sure that we're explaining our broad reach across our states and the level of impact that we've had on individuals and families.

Matthew Wappett 1:13:17

Yeah, well, and I think what you mentioned earlier about moving more in a qualitative direction in those stories, I've read a lot of stuff over the last month or so about how right policy makers aren't looking at data anymore. Data seems to be anyway, there's a war on evidence, and one of the most powerful things we have are these stories. Right? How these programs changed a person's life or made a family's life better I mean, stories are really becoming increasingly important. I think in some of these policy decisions, data still important, and it will continue to be important, but at the present time, it doesn't quite hold the same power that it did 15-20, years ago.

Derek Nord 1:14:05

Yeah, and I would, I would add to that, I think, you know, the stories, and maybe just a point of clarification for the audience, the stories aren't just of that family member. I think there, there are many of our community members that have that benefit. And I think about, you know, educators, special educators. I think about vocational rehabilitation, professions, you know, I think about early childhood. I

think, of course, I think about family members, of adults, of children within these systems, also self-advocates. And I think so, I think there's a lot, there's a large, we're not talking about any one group, because UCEDDs don't focus on any single group. We focus on this network of, this community of support and allies around and I think, I think as a community, we need to be recognizing how we've all benefited from these services. And, you know, I think again, in Indiana, you know, last year we trained almost 100,000 people that included family members, people with disabilities, professionals in various disciplines, a lot of direct support professionals. You know, we provided technical assistance to provide our organization. We do. We're able to do these things because of this, and I think that is these are services that were, you know, I'm going up to provider in a very rural county here in Indiana in two weeks to do a presentation and be with them for a day and have some conversation with their leadership team. I'm able to do it because of the UCEDD grant, and I think, you know, I don't, I don't have to charge folks to do that. I'm able to just deliver that service in our community. And so, I just feel like there's when we're talking about community, the advocacy it really is going to take a community to come together to advocate, not just for the UCEDDs, of course, that is a priority for me, but for Disability Services as a as a whole. I mean, there's a lot under threat right now, so I think that's going to be a really important piece. But I think it's a real it's as a UCEDD director, it's important for folks to realize we are part of that system, and we serve a really important role in that, as we've talked about today. So, you know, I think we need to, we need to be getting in front of people and sharing those stories. Yeah, absolutely.

Matthew Wappett 1:16:35

Well, here, here, at the end, I end the podcast with the same two questions for every single guest that we have on and these get a little personal, but again, with the focus that we have on disability and just diversity and the background that people bring, we're always interested in knowing what motivates people to do the work that they do. You know, disability is not a field that that a lot of people choose to go into, and usually people who go into it have a personal connection. So, I'm curious from both of you, what motivates you to do this work? Why do you do what you do? What Randall? Why don't we start with you on that one?

Randall Owen 1:17:20

But you're right, like the answer is personal, like I'm a person with a disability. When I graduated college, I really thought about what I wanted to do and what would make me happier for the rest of my life, and I think that I knew who I was, and I knew the kind of things I was interested in, right, like with my undergraduate degrees. I was very interested in policy, I was interested in systems, I was interested in research on a graduate program that would help me with those things, I happen to be within a UCEDD, and I'm just going to stay there the rest of my career so far, because it's been really interesting to me. I get to do a lot of work that makes a big impact of the people in the community I care about, and they're probably going to impact me in my own life. I think about the work that my center is doing in schools and like it's going to impact my son, who has a significant ADHD diagnosis and some other behavioral diagnoses. Is going to get meded by these things. So, the fact that I'm doing something that impacts my own life and my family's life like that's what's the most important.

Matthew Wappett 1:18:53

Yeah, thank you. Randall Derek, what about you? What motivates you? Why do you do what you do?

Derek Nord 1:18:59

Yeah, yeah, that's, you know, I, I don't have a family history of disability or intellectual developmental disability, but, you know, I was, I was raised in a generation where I was in schools that were inclusive. I was in recreation programs. I played sports that were inclusive, and I got to see this firsthand and through that, I have friends, I had teammates. I have classmates that had various disabilities, including intellectual developmental disabilities. Developmental Disabilities. I was raised with a strong value around civil rights and, you know, when I left college, it was, you know, I told you about that kind of crossroad moment, that fork in the road where I was like, I could go to a bank and be a loan officer. I could. Do that, and I like, I can't do that. I just don't want to. I want to go down this space. And, you know, that's never gone away. And I think core to this work that I do, but I think that many of us do, why it's important for me is, is there are, there remain many people that do not have the same opportunities that I have there, and that is not okay. And, and it is very obvious to me. It was obvious to me when I was a kid out of college, and now, and, and I just feel like that is that is something that we need more people fighting in this space to make sure that everyone has the opportunities. Because here's, we live in a pretty great place, and everyone has that, should have that the right to be able to benefit from it. So, I just, I've just been very passionate about that since young age. So that's, that's why I do it. Yeah,

Matthew Wappett 1:20:58

well, and that's a great argument for public education, right? Being in public education where you're with diverse students and students with disabilities, it changes the way that you see the world. So absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, thanks, Derek. So, the last question, because one of our focuses at the journal is trying to make information more inclusive and accessible. So, I always like to ask folks, what's one thing you've been doing to make your work more inclusive and accessible? So why don't we go back to you Randall on that one, what's one thing you've been doing there in your work, your personal work, to make it more inclusive and accessible?

Randall Owen 1:21:34

I guess I just think the fact that I'm a faculty member at our university, I go to all these meetings, like, I have a very clear physical disability, like I show up in my power wheelchair. And like, I love enjoys there, but I like, kind of challenging those phases and seeing how uncomfortable it is because people have not thought about the fact that I do belong in a lot of those spaces. And you know, after I've been there, then I can kind of slowly start to see things change. So, like, the next time I go to that meeting, there's an accessible place for me, and they've intentionally thought about making sure that there's not enough room around the desks and the tables that I can get there. Think my own dean's office has been a lot of changes, because I do have to go into the dean's office. Every couple of weeks, and it's much more accessible now than it was before. So, I think just the fact that I personally can go and challenge what is kind of conceptualized as what a person with a disability can and can't do, and where they should and shouldn't be. I think my own life is kind of challenging those assumptions, and I do enjoy seeing people squirm a little bit. I see that it does like that is one thing that kind of sticks in people's heads when they can see it, and then things get better from there. So, I could talk about it as much as I want but showing up and doing something is better.

Matthew Wappett 1:23:37

Yeah, absolutely. Well, and I love the fact that, right, you're challenging those norms in higher ed, where disability, as you pointed out, you had several disability programs supporting students in higher ed. Higher Ed is really not a terribly inclusive space, so it's important to have folks in leadership who can challenge some of those assumptions. I think so. Thank you, Derek, what about you? What's one thing you've been doing to make your work more inclusive and accessible?

Derek Nord 1:24:06

Well, you know, I know I spoke a little bit about technology and just the importance of making data accessible using technology and being able to get it in the hands of people, I've taken that a bit further just recently. You know, AI is an interesting moment. Moments, maybe not the right word, but it's an interesting it's an interesting time right now that we're living in. And, you know, as a UCEDD, as a university, we are renowned for just creating and creating and having stuff, and I just it has we're really working hard on finding ways to leverage this technology to make sure that that that everybody can have access to the to the wealth of information we have because and in an accessible way. And I think AI is one of those. Really, potentially powerful tools. But if we right now aren't thinking on the ground floor while we're on the ground floor near the ground, how does will this be inclusive of people with intellectual developmental disabilities, how will we build experiences and accessible technologies that they can then leverage as well for leveraging the power of AI. So right now, we're, we've got some projects in the hopper really focused on that and trying to get our arms around, what is massively complex and difficult thing to get our arms around. But that's kind of it's a fun it's a fun moment.

Matthew Wappett 1:25:35

So, it is now, and that brings up AI is a whole other topic that I would love to do a conversation on, yeah, for a later date, once you've got your tools all figured out. Well, thank you both for taking time out of your day to visit with us. I really do appreciate it. And any last thoughts here before we wrap up,

Derek Nord 1:26:00

can't say enough about this network. I mean, there's reason I work in it, and it's it. I Not a day goes by. I never regretted working in this, in this field, in this space, and for this purpose, I it is it is a moment. You know, there's a lot of concern and questions, but I I'm optimistic, and I know we do good work, and we serve our communities well. And I would just say, you know, to the audience listening, keep it up, and let's make sure we talk about what we're doing to the people that are making decisions right now.

Matthew Wappett 1:26:34

Yeah, absolutely. Any last thoughts? Randall,

Randall Owen 1:26:40

I think just kind of echoing that, like it's so it's so difficult for me to put into words how important I think the network is. Like I go back so I did my graduate programs. Stayed at the University of North Chicago as a postdoc, and then a faculty member, and I was the Associate Director Center there, and then my wife got a postdoc in Berkeley, so I had to leave for a year. I got a job at UCSF, great institution. Is pretty good job. But I felt so lost during the year, just being out of the network like I did. I was looking for any sort of way to get back in the network like I just can. It was so unfathomable for me to be out of the network. So, I think just the fact that I felt that strong pull to come back to the network, just like I'm really

working on how to describe what the network means, but like I always just think of that, I think that's really important to remember when it comes to my own story.

Matthew Wappett 1:28:07

Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you both for again, taking time to visit and to share your thoughts. I appreciate your Yeah, insightful responses, and I'm hoping that this motivates some folks to maybe get out and share their stories about the important work that we do. So, thank you again. So that's it for our conversation today with Derek and Randall. I appreciate their time to come by and to visit with us and to share their background and expertise. It's important to note that this podcast would not be possible without the efforts of the DDNJ Managing Editor and author insight Podcast Producer Alex Schiwal. Like to thank Alex for her hard work to get this podcast out. We'd also like to thank the Utah State University Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice, for their financial and in-kind support of this podcast and the journal. And the journal also receives support from the Utah State University Libraries and Digital Commons, so we're grateful for their ongoing efforts as well, as I mentioned earlier, please be sure to subscribe to our podcast feed on Apple, Spotify, Stitcher, Overcast, Podbean, or wherever you get your podcast, leave us a rating and a review, and please share this podcast with your friends and colleagues, your ratings, reviews and shares, help us share this important work that is being done in the field today. So, if you want to learn more, you can learn more about the Developmental Disabilities Network Journal at the journal's website, which is digital commons.usu.edu/ddnj, and you can download a podcast transcript in English and Spanish and learn more about our podcast guests and with links to their work. And to other relevant information at the IDRPP webpage, which is idrpp.usu.edu, go under research, and at the very top there you'll see the DDNJ Journal and podcast links. Thanks so much for tuning in today. Keep up the good work. You're making a difference, and we want you to know that what you do matters. Stay tuned for our next episode, we're going to be talking with DD network directors. Thanks, and have a great rest of your day.