

PAMELA LAMAR-DUKES: My name is Pamela Lamar-Dukes, and I am representing TASH. We are an international organization and we represent persons with significant support needs. Some of our constituents include persons themselves with disabilities or self-advocates. We also have researchers, parents, professionals, community service personnel, so the full gamut, students as well. One of the things that I tell people about what we are doing with the Partnership, and it's actually become very easy for me now, I have only been with the Partnership since January but in that short period of time, I have seen that there are a lot of different things that we have with the Partnership such as the user's guide, the collections, and things such of that nature that are very beneficial to our members. One of the things we do is we try to make sure that we get that information out to the members through our electronic newsletter.

In one of my other capacities at the organization, I am the director for outreach. What we primarily do is outreach to families of color, that being a broad sense so it is African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, you know, just the full gamut, and we do this throughout the country. So, one of the biggest concerns, and I know this is a long-winded answer, but one of the big concerns that a lot of the families have is that they don't understand what is going on in their schools. They don't understand how they can access services. Even some of the teachers and administrators that we have worked with also feel the same way. So, this is a great way to give those resources back to those communities.

I think some of the things that make the Partnership successful is the fact that we have a lot of the different organizations as part of the overall IDEA Partnership. I think that kind of solidifies a buy-in from those organizations. I think that having also people from the state level and even sort of local as well, in having parents there, administrators... we have people that represent just about everybody, and I think that is one of the main things that makes it successful: the relationships that are being built while we're here for these few days, you know, and also the commitment of the staff and also the other members of the IDEA Partnership to making sure that we do the best that we can to have the best outcomes for persons with disabilities.

One of the ways that my participation affects the national organization is that once I leave here, one of the first duties I do is to inform the rest of our staff and consequently our membership, again through like our electronic newsletter and also our *Connections Magazine*, we put a little blurb in there so that they will get the information because we know that one of the biggest things that we do is information giving. The other thing that I think that helps me personally, again, is to be able to have a resource to draw upon so when I get questions from members or I get questions from just general people because we have people that will call us about just anything as it relates to persons with significant support needs, I have something that I can say, well, have you tried this, or you can go to this website and get more information. So, I think that is one of the biggest

things. Also, having a sense or a feeling of that it is not just us, you know, that when I come with this information this is not something that's just something that's germane to TASH, but it's almost like having, you know, the Verizon people behind you, the network behind you. You have that and you can say, "Well it's not just me against everyone else," we have so many people behind us.

Up until this point I have been pretty quiet, well of course, as quiet as I can possibly be. Of course I am talking when we are in the meetings and things like that, but other than that I have been pretty quiet because I wasn't sure exactly what I could bring. Since this last particular meeting, this present one, I found that there are some things that I could bring to the table that, you know, we don't have to reinvent the wheel through the Partnership because we are already doing it.

One of the biggest things that I think that we as TASH can bring is that we already have a partnership developed and we have an initiative that we've run a second year now of, which is to try to reach out to the families of color. That's something that we are not doing as much in the Partnership and it's been raised by some other people at this particular meeting.

MODERATOR: – I think it was on a slide.

PAMELA LAMAR-DUKES: Right, that's something I think that, you know, I can help with. Again we are already doing it so trying to just infuse what we are already doing and putting the Partnership in, I think that's something that we can definitely help with.

We started out last year we had two partners, this year we have five. These are all national disability organizations. Our partners are the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, the ARC National Council on Independent Living, National Down Syndrome Congress, and the Autism Society of America. With each of those partners, what we do is first of all we sponsor people to their conferences and we provide membership to those families and individuals to their organization, and then we work with the organization to try to build capacity on cultural competence within that organization. So, to that end, what we do is we'll facilitate an action plan with each of our partners, and then we try to help them to achieve their steps. We work pretty closely with them so it's not just a one-shot type thing, and we try to not only work with the organization but also their board and their staff and everything.

We have been talking about cultural competence within TASH for a number of years, ever since I can remember of being a member and I have been a member for a little over ten years now, so we have been talking about that, the need for reaching out to families of color. It really evolved in that core group of members, one in particular had a relationship with Kellogg, who is one of our

fundings, and we were able to secure a grant through them to do this. As a matter of getting this grant, then we had to reach out to the partners and try to develop some relationships. It's really interesting because a lot of our partners are also partners of the IDEA Partnership, so that gives us even more to talk about. You know not just the cultural competence but also what's going on globally within the organizations. We recognize that cultural competence really should be something that's embedded throughout the organization.

I think one of the great things that we can offer is that one, we are already doing this and we know that it's something that really needs to be done, and to let Joanne and the staff know exactly what we are doing and to make sure that as we're out there, we're not only just promoting this relationship that we have with our partners, the five partners that I mentioned, but we also promote the relationship that we have with the IDEA Partnership. I think that that's even bigger in that the IDEA Partnership is a whole bunch of other organizations and affiliates, so I think that's one thing we could be doing.

I think the other thing we could do is share with Joanne and the staff some of the things that we've done in terms of assessing our own organization in terms of cultural competence. We hired the National Center on Cultural Competence at Georgetown University to develop, well, to assess our organization for cultural competence. That's not something that's supposed to be a one-shot thing. You assess yourself and then you figure out, okay these are some of the opportunities that we have, you work on those and then you can assess again. So, it's not a gotcha type thing. We did that with our organization and we said, oh this is such a wonderful idea we need to do more. So, one of the things that we are doing this year is we are contracting with them for them to develop a self-assessment tool for organizations that work with persons with disabilities. Well, that tool could be used once we have it developed, that's something we can bring to the Partnership and say, hey CEC, if you want to do this you can do this. You know, and all of these different organizations. I think by having those types of resources and tools that we bring, that it only helps with the other organizations in particular, but also the IDEA Partnership in mass. I just started with the Partnership since January, but this is when you get some of the "aha" moments when the things start to click and you're like, oh, this relationship with this person and I could be doing this. So, this is my second big meeting, so, you know, you know, okay it took me two meetings but still, but it's clicking now. These are some things that I think that we could bring to the Partnership and I think that it will make the Partnership just that much stronger.

Have I started to see ways that we can actually effect change, not just within the organization but national, local levels? After the first meeting in January, I was very excited because we were talking a little about transition. I went to one of the transition meetings and one of the, my old boss who's still a good friend of mine, I called her immediately after it and she is a supervisor at Broward County, Florida. I called her and I said, you know, there were other

states that were there, I think Pennsylvania was there and Virginia I believe was there, there were some other states there, and the first thing I thought was why isn't Florida here? You know, there was nobody there from Florida. So, I called her up and I am like, you know, I was at this meeting and it was really, really good information, why isn't Florida part of this? And even if Florida isn't a part of this, why aren't, you know, I am letting you know because you need to be a part of this. Because, what ends up happening in Florida, and I know this is probably—this is a really funny thing, but what ends up happening in Florida is that Florida usually acquiesces to whatever Dade and Broward - you know we one of the bigger areas, so if we are doing something, then it usually goes through Florida or whatever. So, one of the things that I wanted her to do because she is over transition, she is over persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities there in that county, I wanted her to take notice and know that it was there.

One of the things when I was working in Broward County, and I did a lot of technical assistance because I worked with the Florida Inclusion Network before, and we did a lot of technical assistance to schools and school districts and administrators, you know, professional development, all of that, and one of the things that has always struck me is that schools and principals don't know. They don't have the time sometimes to look at all of these little bits of information or research where that information is to be able to bring it back to their schools to really have some—to effect change for their students. So, one of the things that I think is really cool is for us, who have the time and the resources, to then filter that information back to them because if they have the information, and I really love that Joanne had the E-news and the little brief, I really like that because it is a quick down and dirty this is it, if you want more information this is where you go, and I think that will be more receptive to some of the people who are in the field that may not have enough time to go to the library or the university to say, okay, what's the newest research-validated practice that I should be doing, but this will be a good way for them to do it. So, I'm really excited about that. I actually still like reading and I don't have a choice right now, but it's a great way of getting that information back to them and hopefully, that will effect some change as well.

Well, I am thinking that if we have that change in terms of the thinking of the persons who are actually delivering the service and teaching our students that that will affect the achievement of the students. Because if they are exposed to great teaching, great practices that are effective, they have already been validated, we know that it works and they have access to this, then it can only hopefully be a positive in terms of their achievement. I think then too, it gives the teachers something to fall back on so that they feel that they have some tools that they can pull out of their toolbox, so therefore they are more confident in what they do. I think that if you effect the change on one level and it filters down and it keeps filtering down, what ends up happening sometimes though is that we effect change on the top level and it doesn't filter down. So, we have to make

sure that it gets down to the people who are actually going to be doing the service.

What enables the trickle down, I believe, is that when you have to effect things on different levels. So, as I am talking to my friend in Broward County Direct, I am talking to her she is an administrator, but I am also talking to parents because sometimes the parents will actually effect some change as well. I am also talking to school teachers. I am also talking to state level administrators. One of the things that I was very excited about because of course, my mind was like working a mile a minute yesterday, is that one of the areas that we just entered into two weeks ago was Sacramento, California. The reason I am so excited about that is because at that particular meeting we not only had parents, administrators, researchers from the college, we had so many different people, but the other thing that we had there was that the mayor there was very interested in what we were doing. As a matter of fact, we exchanged information and I said, oh, I will you know, e-mail you once I get back. Well, I had something else to do after that, and he e-mailed me. I was like, who knew. You know, that usually doesn't happen. So, I am really excited about that because we really can effect a lot of change if we have someone from the mayor's office as well who is actually interested in not only education but the education of persons with disabilities. So, I am really excited. Of course, that was one of the, that's going to be one of the places that we are really going to hone in with the IDEA Partnership there.

I think some of the factors and features and characteristics that would keep me involved would be that we're really doing something. It's not one of those things where you go to a meeting and you are saying oh, this is a good idea, but nothing really happens afterwards. Since January, I come back this one and there is more that has happened. So, it really keeps you on your toes to try to figure out, oh okay, well I really have to be more active because I need to know what's going on. I think that's one thing. The other thing is also the energy that is exuded at these meetings when so many people come together for a common cause. I think that is just something that you can't replicate anywhere else. Even if you want to slack off, you can't, because someone else is going to pull you in and say, oh, we gotta do this, you know, which is really cool. I think that keeps people motivated to continue this type of work.

This is actually one of the best investments OSEP probably has done. I think that OSEP in general may not be able to get the word out as much or as effective as this partnership will. If OSEP says something, sometimes by the time it filters down it's like oh yeah, that's just something that the government wants to impose on us again, or it's not necessarily viewed the same way that it would be viewed when all of the different affiliates and organizations come down to their members and their affiliates and say this is something that we're signed on to, we believe in, and the message is just conveyed differently when it comes through

this means as opposed to just coming from OSEP. So I think this is a wonderful investment that they've done.