



ADA Live! Episode 119: Celebrate the ADA! Learn about ADA National Network and NIDILRR

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Guest: Shelley Reeves, ADA National Network Program Coordinator and Section 21 Program Coordinator for the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR)

Host: Pam Williamson, Assistant Project Director of the Southeast ADA Center

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Shelley Reeves: Hi, I am Shelly Reeves and you're listening to ADA Live.

4 Wheel City: Yo. All right. Let's roll. Let's go.

Pamela Williamson:

Hello everyone. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and the ADA national network. Welcome to ADA Live. I am Pam Williamson, assistant director of the Southeast ADA Center listening audience. If you have any questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, you can use the online form anytime at adalive.org or call the Southeast ADA Center at 404-541-9001. All calls are free and confidential.

The Southeast ADA Center is part of the ADA National Network, a group of 10 regional centers that inform people about their rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act, also known as the ADA. The ADA National Network was created in 1991,

soon after the ADA was passed on July 26th, 1990. In this episode, in celebration of the 33rd ADA anniversary, we will discuss the important role of the ADA national network and the 10 regional ADA centers across the United States. We'll explain the work we do and why it's so important. We'll also discuss how the network supports the unique role, the National Institute on Disability and Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research has and rehabilitation research and how the research leads to the long-term outcomes of independence, community participation and employment of people with disabilities.

Our guest for this episode is Shelly Reeves. Ms. Reeves is the ADA national Network Program Coordinator and Section 21 program coordinator for the National Institute on Disability Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research. We know that the organization name is a long one and it's hard to understand. So the ADA Centers abbreviate the name and call it NIDILRR, which is spelled NIDILRR. We will be saying the organization name is NIDILRR throughout this episode. And Shelley, welcome to the show.

Shelley Reeves:

Thank you. Thank you, Pam.

Pamela Williamson:

Well, we asked you to be our guest on today's podcast to talk about the ADA National Network funding by NIDILRR. So what is the ADA National Network and why was it created?

Shelley Reeves:

Sure, thanks for that question. Well, the ADA national network is a network of 10 regional centers that are located in one in each of the 10 federal regions and the ADA regional centers provide training, technical assistance and disseminate information on the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Pamela Williamson:

And what is your role with the A national network and NIDILRR? How does NIDILRR help promote the ADA awareness and education?

Shelley Reeves:

Well, my role with the program is to coordinate the program, stay in contact with all of the regional centers and the work that they are doing, and also kind of help direct the program as it evolves throughout the years. As you mentioned, we have been funding the program since the early nineties, starting back in 1991. And I guess what I should maybe first stop and do and tell you just briefly who NIDILRR is and what we do. We're actually a research funding agency. We are part of the Administration for Community Living and the Department of Health and Human Services and NIDILRR, N-I-D-I-L-R-R, our acronym, sponsors research and development that leads to knowledge and products that could be used to improve the health, employment, and community living outcomes for people with a range of disabilities.

So you may be wondering how did NIDILRR become the home of the ADA National Network program. It really kind of stems back to NIDILRR's experience in supporting information dissemination and technical assistance on issues related to disability. So back in 1991, Congress provided additional funding to NIDILRR to support a technical assistance initiative related to the implementation of the ADA. As you mentioned, the ADA was passed back in 1990 in response to congressional directives and the needs expressed by representatives of the disability and business organizations. NIDILRR was funded to establish a program of regional centers. So whole purpose of the sort of regional center network was to be able to address a wide range of issues related to implementation of the ADA and be a resource for individuals with disabilities and others with responsibilities and rights under the ADA. So we initially were provided with funding back in '91 and have been funding the ADA national network since that time.

Pamela Williamson:

It's really amazing that the ADA National Network and NIDILRR have been at this since 1991. And a lot of people don't realize that this technical assistance piece was actually

listed in Title five of the ADA. So this is exciting that we're celebrating 32 years of the ADA national network this year.

Shelley Reeves:

Absolutely.

Pamela Williamson:

So how has focus and purpose of the A national network changed over the last 33 years since the ADA was passed in 1990? Because we started out just as a technical assistance center teaching people about the ADA and helping them understand their legal rights. But we've also added research to our plate in the past 15 years.

Shelley Reeves:

Right, right. You're absolutely right. Well, the program, you're right, initially started out solely providing training, technical assistance, and disseminating information on the ADA. And then what we found is that it was going to be really critical to make sure that the ADA National Network Program was aligned with the mission and purpose of NIDILRR, more closely aligned with the mission and purpose of NIDILRR, and that being in conducting research. So what we did was add a research component to the ADA National Network program and asked grantees to conduct scientifically-based research and to use evidence-based practices in conducting their work. So in essence, we restructured and strengthened the ADA national network and further enabled program grantees to make significant impacts on disability and rehabilitation outcomes through scientifically-based research, specifically related to the ADA.

Pamela Williamson:

And Shelley, I am one of the ones that was brought into research with a little bit of trepidation because it was not something I had done up until that point. But I must admit that it has been quite a benefit to the ADA Centers and really being able to dig in and see how the ADA impacts people on a regular basis and as they go through their daily lives.

Shelley Reeves:

Absolutely. Right. Yes.

Pamela Williamson:

So the full primary goals of the AADA include full participation, equal opportunity, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities. Do you have some specific examples of research or other work that NIDILRR and the ADA national network have done towards these goals?

Shelley Reeves:

Yes. We are really proud of the work that the ADA national network has been doing over these years and is currently involved. We have a range of examples of research activities and other activities that the network has been involved in.

Just to give you a sense of the range of research topics that the ADA regional centers have been involved in. We have regional centers that are conducting studies to increase the understanding of ADA implementation among small employers and finding the best practices in doing that. We have a center that has conducted a study to identify challenges to implementing the ADA for cities in town. So really looking at some very local issues and how ADA implementation has progressed. Some centers are conducting some studies in the area of workplace accommodations and transition to post-secondary settings. We have other centers that are focused on specific industries such as the hospitality industry and looking at ways to assist hotels and restaurants and increasing, enhancing their accessibility to their places of business.

We were very much involved as a resource to the community during the pandemic, and we developed a Covid 19 web portal in response to the pandemic and provided a range of information to assist people with disabilities and having accurate information on their rights under ADA and how to apply these right relative to the pandemic. WE even produced specific fact sheets that were helpful in understanding the ADA and face mask

policies. There have been a number of things specifically related to Covid that I know was a real resource to the community.

We have a range of training opportunities that are available from the network. We provide an audio conference series that provides information about the ADA and trends in implementation and compliance with the ADA. We have an online webinar series, an audio conference series that provides training and information on accessibility issues. So a number of very important resources, research activities and training information that has all been done by our wonderful regional centers.

Pamela Williamson:

And Shelley, I think that's one of the beauties of the ADA National Network and the way we're set up with regional centers is that we can all bring strength to the table and do this wide variety of work. And I must admit, I'm biased because I've been around for a while, but it just always amazes me at the depth and breadth of the work that we do. In addition to working within the network itself, NIDILRR has always encouraged us to work together with disability rights groups and other organizations. Can you give us some examples and the impact that this work has had on the disability community?

Shelley Reeves:

Oh, sure. Sure. I think a great example of how the regional centers work with other disability rights groups and other disability organizations is that each regional center has ties to state and local organizations in their region in order to increase the capacity of those state and local organizations to actually provide technical assistance on the ADA, disseminate information on the ADA, and provide training and promote awareness of the ADA.

So as I mentioned, each of the regional centers has established at least one affiliate in every state. And these state affiliates carry out their activities in collaboration with coalitions of organizations that are interested in promoting the implementation of the ADA.

In addition, I know that the regional centers provide support to and actually collaborate very closely with centers for Independent Living in each region so that they can increase the capacity of the Centers for Independent Living to promote successful implementation of the ADA throughout the provision of technical assistance and training.

Pamela Williamson:

Well, I must admit that one of my favorite things about the way we're set up is the fact we are about capacity building and really to help other groups learn about the ADA and be able to implement it at both the state and local community levels.

Well, Shelley, we thank you for this great information so far. We're ADA Live listening audience. If you have questions about this topic or other ADA Live topic, you may submit your questions online at www.adalive.org or call the southeast ADA Center at 404-541-9001. And now a word from the episode sponsor, the ADA National Network.

Voice Over:

The ADA National Network provides information, guidance, and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act tailored to meet the needs of business, government, and individuals at local, regional and national level. The ADA National Network consists of 10 regional ADA centers in the United States providing local assistance to ensure that the ADA is implemented wherever possible. The ADA National Network is not an enforcement agency, but a helpful resource supporting the ADA's mission to make it possible for everyone with a disability to live a life of freedom and equality.

Pamela Williamson:

All right, welcome back everyone. I'm Pam Williamson with the Southeast ADA Center. Our guest is Shelley Reeves, the ADA National Network Program Coordinator and Section 21 program coordinator for the National Institute on Disability Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research, also known as NIDILRR. We've been talking about the A national network and the work of the 10 regional centers to answer questions and provide

information and resources about rights and responsibilities under the ADA and other disability rights laws.

So what are the three or four most common topics that people ask about? I know at our center we tend to hear a lot about employment and reasonable accommodations, service animals, facility access, and specifically parking and housing. So would you agree that those are probably some of the most talked about topics?

Shelley Reeves:

Absolutely. Absolutely, yes. In many instances, the technical assistance even goes beyond those particular topic areas. And as I'm sure you know, there's a wide range of topics and those are some of the more common ones. But really the regional centers provide a range of technical assistance. And I would say that today types of questions that the regional centers receive is even more complex than the type of technical assistance that the regional centers were initially providing. And this is probably a result of really covered entities really seeking to stay current with the growing body of legal precedents as well as standards and policy guidance issued by responsible federal agencies. But there are still many covered entities and individuals that need information on the most fundamental requirements of the law. So we know that our regional centers have to be prepared to provide basic information about the ADA as well as be able to respond to more complex requests for technical assistance and training. And we're very proud of the fact that our regional centers are staffed and equipped to be able to provide that kind of information and technical assistance as well as training.

Pamela Williamson:

Well, in addition to these common topics, I know that there are several emerging topics that we're starting to see such as intersectionality of disability and digital access, because let's face it, in 1990 when the ADA was passed, the internet was still in its infancy and technology was not nearly to what the extent that it is today. So what have you seen in these areas or even others that you may think of?

Shelley Reeves:

One emerging area that I really see the ADA national network turning towards is being able to address the needs of minority communities and making sure that there's equity across communities and understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act and the rights and responsibilities that individuals have.

So I would say that is definitely an emerging area. In fact, the regional centers are engaging in a national effort to provide training and technical assistance and outreach to underserved individuals and helping them understand their rights under the ADA and specifically focusing on the needs of Spanish-speaking communities. So that has been an exciting development and expansion and outreach that we are witnessing in the most current cycle.

Pamela Williamson:

Yeah, I'm really excited about our outreach to Spanish-speaking communities and the way that the network has come together to make this such a priority. I'm hoping that we're going to continue to see an expansion of our technical assistance and training for those underserved groups.

Shelley Reeves:

Absolutely.

Pamela Williamson:

Now the 10 regional ADA centers do produce a lot of materials, and we use those to teach people about their rights and responsibilities under the ADA and other disability rights laws. And these materials include fact sheets, websites, infographics, webinars, web courses and more. They're available on the ADA National Network website at adata.org. How does the ADA National Network decide what topics or areas of interest to focus on when developing these information materials?

Shelley Reeves:

That's a good question. Yeah. Our regional centers are so well-connected with one another, and this makes for great opportunity to discuss across regions emerging trends that they're seeing in terms of their technical assistance needs in their communities, identifying what types of technical assistance or training materials might be needed based on the types of inquiries they are receiving. Our regional centers get together twice a year to discuss those particular trends and to identify particular topics that are common across all the regions so that they can make a good determination about what kinds of additional technical assistance materials and training opportunities are needed across the country. So they do a great job of collaborating with one another and identifying common needs across the regions and making decision about the kinds of technical assistance resources and training opportunities that would be helpful to meet those needs.

Pamela Williamson:

And again, anyone that's interested in looking at those fact sheets or learning more about the web courses, we encourage you to go to adata.org.

Now, Shelley, one of the things that folks may not realize is that NIDILRR actually developed long range plan for its work. And I know that we're currently wrapping up the current long range plan and for 2023 and then headed into one for 2024 through 2028. I think I got that right.

Shelley Reeves:

That's correct.

Pamela Williamson:

And so can you just tell us a little bit about how that process works?

Shelley Reeves:

Sure, sure. So we're excited as we are in the midst of developing our next long range plan. NIDILRR takes public comment from all sectors of the community, find out what's on people's minds and what they feel are pressing issues for the disability community. And

we have also held several focus groups so that constituents, stakeholders can share concerns, perspectives with our NIDILRR director in terms of what they feel might be helpful to consider as we are developing our next long range plan. So we are, as I said, in the midst of developing that. That should be out by the end of the year, and that will be our next long range plan for 2024 through 2028.

Pamela Williamson:

Well, we encourage folks to actually go look at the NIDILRR long range plan, the current plan is on their website, and then when it's time for the other one to be released, it will also be on the website. So we encourage you to take a look at it and see where NIDILRRs has gone before, and hopefully we'll be able to see where they're going soon.

So, well, Shelley, you've shared a lot of wonderful information with us today and about the work of NIDILRR and the ADA National Network. Do you have any final thoughts to share with us before we wrap up?

Shelley Reeves:

Well, I just encourage you, everyone to please visit the ADA National Network website, adata.org, and make use of the many resources and training opportunities of the network and get in touch with the regional center that's serving your area. They are a great resource and available to provide training and technical assistance on the ADA. I think that you will find the information that's available through your regional center to be very helpful, and I just encourage you to stay in contact with the ADA national network.

Pamela Williamson:

Well, thank you, Shelley. We appreciate all of your information that you've shared today. And listeners, we thank you for joining us for this episode, celebrating the 33rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. While we have a long way to go to achieve full equality for people with these disabilities, we do recognize how far we've come in the past 33 years.

So thank you for joining us for this episode. And you can access all ADA Live episodes with archived audio, accessible transcripts, and resources on our website at adalive.org. You may also listen to the SoundCloud ADA Live channel at soundcloud.com/adalive, and then download ADA Live to your mobile device in your podcast app by searching for ADA Live. If you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, please use the online form anytime at adalive.org or contact your regional center at 1-800-949-4232. All calls are free and confidential.

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4 Wheel City:

They watching. They don't want us be part of the city, man. They put all these steps, man. All these curbs we can't get over. All these inaccessible stores. 4 Wheel City. They don't want us here. We'll survive and we're going to make our own place. Our own world. The 4 Wheel City-

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