ADA Live! Episode 122: How the ADA National Network Connects with Hispanic and Latino Communities of People with Disabilities

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Date: October 15, 2023

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Contact Oscar Online Link: https://www.adagreatlakes.org/WebForms/ContactUs/Default.asp?attention=Oscar%20Gonzalez.

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Introduction to ADA Live:

Oscar Gonzalez

Hi, I'm Oscar Gonzalez, and you're listening to ADA Live!
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'm Angelica Deaton, Office Coordinator and Research Assistant at the Southeast ADA Center.

Listening audience, if you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 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.

In this episode, we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs each year from September 15th to October 15th, recognizing Hispanic Americans contributions and rich influence on the history, culture, and achievements of the United States. The Hispanic disability community has an important role to play in this celebration.

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 and other disability rights laws. The ADA National Network was created in 1991 after the act was passed on July 26, 1990. The ADA National Network created a Multicultural Outreach Committee about three years ago.

In celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, we will learn about the Americans with Disabilities Act and discuss how the ADA National Network and its Multicultural Outreach Committee educate the Hispanic disability community about their rights under the ADA. We'll also explain the purpose of the Multicultural Outreach Committee and why its work is so important.

In addition, we will discuss how the ADA National Network and its Multicultural Outreach Committee are developing projects and programs that support the independence, community participation, and employment of Hispanic people with disabilities.

Oscar Gonzalez from the ADA National Network Knowledge Translation Center at the University of Illinois-Chicago is our guest for this ADA Live episode. Oscar is the Spanish Language Outreach Program Coordinator for the ADA National Network.

Welcome to the show, Oscar!
Oscar Gonzalez:

Well, thank you for having me here today. It's a pleasure to talk to you. Angelica.

Angelica Deaton

Thank you, Oscar,

Óscar, welcome! To start this episode, we would like you to tell us a little about yourself and your personal and professional trajectory.

Oscar Gonzalez:

Yes, well. My background has been working with immigrants and Spanish speakers for almost a decade. So, I was working first in the political area. I've been working for a member of Congress who is offering a lot of assistance for people with immigration, and there, in that job, I assisted in immigration cases, citizenship applications, and family petition applications. I was assisting in Social Security matters, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Education, and after that, I changed places of employment and worked for an organization that assists parents with children with special needs. So, there I was, a coordinator. And there, what I did was help them navigate the system used to order supplies and hire the nursing agencies, as they had nurses at home. They also had access to adaptations to their homes, depending on the program they were in the system under the State Department. They also navigated the medical areas, such as the specialists' appointments. After that time, I went to school again; I went for an additional degree, and out of school in public administration, I came back, and well, I started here with the ADA National Network. Here, we will return and increase knowledge of the law for people with disabilities in Spanish.

Angelica Deaton:

How impressive, Oscar! Thank you for all this that you have shared with us, which are also all issues that touch us a lot in the Hispanic community: immigration, health, disability. And
all this work you've done with people with disabilities is super important. Well, like I said, we are celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15th to October 15th, and some audience members might wonder why this celebration takes place in the middle of one month until the next instead of starting the calendar month as the first day. Could you explain briefly why we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month in this way?

**Oscar Gonzalez:**

Yes, so Hispanic Heritage Month begins in the middle of the month on September 15. The reason? It's because several countries in Latin America are celebrating their independence and have anniversaries during this week. So, we're talking about countries like North America (Mexico). Then we have other countries in Central America and South America celebrating Independence, which started in the late 1960s, and now it's a week to celebrate those independences. Still, in the late 1980s, the number of days it was celebrated increased; it was done in a single month of celebration to raise awareness of the contributions that Hispanics made here in the United States, and it also celebrated the diversity of Latin America. We are talking about people from Mexico, the Caribbean and Caribbean islands in Central America, and South America. Also, the most important thing is to recognize the cultural traditions and the different languages we all have, including indigenous languages.

**Angelica Deaton**

How wonderful! We have many things to celebrate, and as Hispanics, we also feel very proud.

Moving a little bit to the issue that concerns us today, Oscar, as a Hispanic, I understand that our community does not know much about the ADA or what the Americans with Disabilities Act means. So, before we get into the topic we're looking at today, we should give more context on what the ADA means and what it entails.

**Oscar Gonzalez:**

Yes, so if you're ready, that's what we will talk about right now.
Angelica Deaton:

I'm ready, and I'm putting my ears open here because this is a topic that interests us all.

Oscar Gonzalez:

OK, the ADA for people with disabilities is a civil rights law. It is a federal law that means that throughout the United States, it must be complied with. This was created in the nineties after several years of struggle by people with disabilities to have a federal law. There was also an amendment in 2008, so the ADA was designed to protect the rights of people with disabilities and prohibit discrimination against those in various areas of life, such as receiving public services and assistance at work for accommodations. The goals are to ensure equal opportunity, access, and participation for people with disabilities in an area like the one I had mentioned and in transportation and telecommunications. Then, the ADA has several provisions; as I mentioned employment, there, it prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities who are qualified to do the job, and this includes everything like hiring, promotion, compensation, and work capacity. All private employers with 15 or more employees are covered by the ADA. Some states may have stricter rules, such as what an employee would have to have. In public places, the ADA also offers protections and gives rights in businesses that are open to the public, like restaurants, hotels, and theaters, to be accessible to people with disabilities, and this includes public transportation like trains and buses also must be accessible to people with disabilities, and this also includes state and local government services.

So, to make sure that the programs and services that governments offer can be available to people with disabilities and so that the areas of those government sites are accessible to be able to access their services. And finally, the issue of telecommunications: we almost don't use the phone lines at home; almost all of us have cell phones. But there are also protections and counseling to offer accommodations so that people with medical, hearing, or ADA conditions can access their services. So, in summary, the ADA has had a lot of impact on improving the lives of people with disabilities here in the United States and promoting inclusion, accessibility, and equality.

Angelica Deaton:
How important is all this information, and to know in what areas this Act protects us. Thank you for letting us know that it covers the issues of telecommunications, employment, and transportation. Many of us don't know and think, or better don't even think about this; we don't even know what we could, or better yet, what tools we could have to demand or enforce our rights. But that also brings me to another question: in the middle of our Hispanic community, we have many members who do not have a defined immigration status. My question is, does the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, cover all of us in general, does our immigration status matter? If we have a defined status here in the United States or not, or because we don't have it, does it cover us?

Oscar Gonzalez:

Yes, so since it's a civil rights law, that means it applies to all people here in the United States, so regardless of gender, age, country of origin, or immigration status in this situation, you still have the right not to have discrimination and to have access to services if a person has a disability.

Angelica Deaton:

Ah, excellent, yes, because many times it is one of the fears of our community to approach us even if their rights have been violated because we do not know if it protects us or not, so this is very important that we know.

Now, you and I work on the ADA National Network’s Multicultural Outreach Committee, and today, we have asked you to be our guest on this podcast so that we can explain how, from our work, we can educate and support our Hispanic community of people with disabilities. So, please tell our audience today about what is your job like as coordinator of the Spanish language outreach program.

Oscar Gonzalez:

Yes, so to begin with, the ADA National Network is a collaboration of 10 regional centers, so there are ten different centers throughout the United States that offer information about the ADA. They answer calls from anyone trying to get more information. Each center is a representative that is part of this group, for us to talk about the language and information for
people who speak Spanish about the ADA. So we meet frequently, and we start talking a little bit more about the materials and the issues that we've seen and that we can create so that people in our community can have better and more informative access to the ADA, so we're in the moment, we're all working, we're giving our ideas and to create more materials in Spanish that are more accessible and have more information that is closer to the ADA. culture and the people in our community.

Angelica Deaton:

We are working more and more on this every day to bring more resources. Well, we'll move on to another question I have for you. it's vital that you and I, as Hispanic community members, reach out to inform our community and others today about the Americans with Disabilities Act, but why is it essential for our ADA network to reach out to the Hispanic disability community?

Oscar Gonzalez:

It's important for us at the ADA National Network to start reaching out to people who speak Spanish in our Community and other languages as well because the people who speak Spanish here in the United States are one of the populations that are growing very fast, and that's one of the largest here. So, people who speak Spanish may not have the knowledge; they don't have the information about their civil rights, as well as the other laws for people with disabilities that can help them, their family members, or their friends. Then, knowing the law, they can know how to access services and accommodations with a disability. They also need to know that they have the right to participate in programs offered. Also, to know that it's a federal law and must be followed in all states, so if you change your location from one state to another, the ADA can still be applied in that other state. And, also, to know that they have protections in place of employment, and this also applies to those who work there, to the people who are employed. And, also to people who have businesses; how can you benefit from having accommodations for people and customers? And more information about what a disability is, here we are talking about a physical disability and also a mental disability. So, recognize that there are different disabilities, and they have protections under the ADA. That opens the conversations for us to be able to talk a little bit more about disability because we know that in our community, it's not something that we normally touch
on. It's also essential to have a place where you have confidence, and it's important for the community to be able to talk about ADA protections. To let more people know about the civil rights protections of the ADA with their family and friends and to know that, as we mentioned previously, this ADA applies to anyone, regardless of age, sex, or immigration status.

Angelica Deaton:

I completely agree with everything you said, the more we know, the more people we know, the easier it is to get services to many in our community. Let's see, Oscar, please tell me about a project that the Multicultural Outreach Committee is working on and how it addresses the needs of the Hispanic community with disabilities.

Oscar Gonzalez:

Yes, so recently, we've been working on a big project that we've all been collaborating on, and it's a project for Spanish language outreach. To get that information, then in English, we call it the Spanish Language Outreach, which is the SLO, and it's a national initiative that collaborates with all the regional centers, and we're doing this for five years under the ADA National Network. And here's what we've done: we've done interviews nationwide and talked to people who had conversations with us about civil rights, disability rights, the resources they use, and information they have about the ADA. So, from these conversations, a quick summary that we can say is that there are barriers for people who speak Spanish and get information, as well as where they get their resources from them. They also had a bit of difficulty finding the resources and what kind of resources they would like to get, so this applies to information about the laws that protect people with disabilities and the ADA. So, from these conversations we've had with the public across the states, we've been creating new materials to get a series of episodes online that will talk about disability. What are the rights of members of the Community? An introduction to rights and also about the barriers and accessibility that Spanish speakers have.

Angelica Deaton:

There are many efforts, many things that are being done, that we hope that soon we will
begin to see in all our ten centers that the whole country will find out, that our entire Hispanic community will be aware of what the ADA does and how this law protects us. Let's see and tell me, is the Committee working on other important projects? Do we have anything in progress that you'd like to share?

Oscar Gonzalez:

Yes, likewise. The Southeast ADA Center also has a course in Spanish. Foundations of the ADA. That after reviewing it by, the Committee, they also saw that there is a benefit to having it in Spanish. So, your center will have this course available soon, this month. So, it will be ADA Foundations, which will offer more information about the ADA's qualifications in employment to government services, places open to the public, and anyone can take the course. They're people with disabilities, people who care for others, other family members with disabilities, professionals—anyone interested in learning more about the ADA civil rights. I'm excited for it to be available for everyone to have access to this information.

Angelica Deaton:

Me too, I'm also very excited about this project because we must start there, right? from the foundations, from the basic things to understand this. So, we do have it available in Spanish, which is going to be very soon in Spanish, and we are going to share it widely, so it is going to be an essential step so that no one feels that they don't have enough information. Thank you, Oscar.

This is excellent information for our listeners today, the ADA Live. Audience: If you have questions about this topic or any other live ADA, you can send us your questions online at www.ADAlive.org or call the Southeast ADA Center. To 404-541-9001. And now we will have a word from our sponsor of this episode, the ADA National Network.

Oscar Gonzalez:

The ADA National Network provides information, guidance, and training on how to implement the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to support the ADA's mission to "ensure equal opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-
sufficiency for people with disabilities."

A project of the National Institute for Research on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation (NIDILRR), the network comprises 10 ADA Regional Centers throughout the United States and an ADA Knowledge Translation Center.

Each ADA Regional Center focuses on the unique needs of its region. This regional approach is critical to ensuring that ADA National Network services meet the needs of diverse populations and stakeholders nationwide. If you have questions, you can call toll-free 1-800-949-4232 or visit adata.org

**Angelica Deaton:**

Welcome back, everyone. I'm Angelica Deaton from the Southeast ADA Center. Our guest is Óscar González, Coordinator of the Spanish Language Extension Program within the ADA National Network's Knowledge Translation Center. We are celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month, and Oscar and I have been discussing how the ADA National Network and its Multicultural Outreach Committee educate and support the Hispanic disability community.

Oscar, I'd like to ask you, does the Multicultural Outreach Committee ever work with outside groups or other disability rights organizations?

**Oscar Gonzalez:**

Well, as I mentioned earlier, the National ADA Network is made up of 10 regional centers. Each center is its own entity, so some are located in universities, others are private businesses, and we all share and work together with local organizations to get information and give resources. So, there are several government agencies that each regional center works or collaborates with to provide more new information or information that has come out or provide more informational resources for materials that are related to the ADA and accessibility. And our goal is to give more information that is new and up-to-date on the new regulations that are made so that all people have more information and can access them. And some of these collaborations that they've had, especially with federal agencies, have been going on for several years, maybe since the centers were founded 30 and 32 years
ago.

**Angelica Deaton:**

Very well, Oscar, we must remember that of the ten centers that you mention, we are the center of the southeast, we work with all the organizations, and we want to work also with more organizations that serve our Hispanic families, especially those with disabilities so that this information reaches them. For the southeast ADA center, it is essential to mention that we work with the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Let's continue with other questions for Oscar because we must take advantage of your presence today.

Oscar, does the Multicultural Outreach Committee have any long-term goals or plans for the next few years?

**Oscar Gonzalez:**

Oh, yes, of course. Oh well, the main goal is to increase our community's information. As I mentioned previously, we're trying to create new material that our community is going to partner with, and they're going to see, and they're going to think they're part of it. That it's made for your culture, for our community. So, a new piece of information that we got through the interviews and conversations is that several people in the Spanish-speaking community noticed that the ways that they receive from the government or other services or non-profit organizations, sometimes the language is a little difficult to understand even if it's in Spanish because it's a direct translation. So, we want to make the new information that we will be giving out easy for them to understand and read, and yes, it's a bigger challenge. At the same time, we know that the ADA has a lot of information and that the work with us is to try to make all that ADA information so they can easily put more information.

Another thing that we're trying to do is be an information hub for local organizations, as you mentioned because every region of the National Network has its own states. Every state, every region, and every center is more informed about what's going on in their state. Also, mentioning that some states must support the ADA at a higher level so that people have more protections, regional centers are key for sharing this information across states. This
means that we have to start sharing the information and have these organizations in our areas start to have more trust with us and that they also tell their audience that we’re going to do an ADA information center, that they have confidence in contacting us. We must let them know that we also have technical assistance phone line to answer any questions they have under the ADA, like what is a disability under the ADA, and the best or most popular question is always there: is it a service animal?

**Angelica Deaton:**

Yes, you are right, and yes, this is a long-term goal because this is a commitment, which takes time to gain confidence that will take many years, but you will see the results.

Tell me what some of the issues are related to the rights of people with disabilities that our Hispanic community continues to face. I know that some are very common have already been mentioned, but I want you to mention those that resonate most in our community.

**Oscar Gonzalez:**

Yes, so part of the conversations that we had had another year, and this includes people who also work in the community, is access to information to the public, and that is that there are not enough details of programs or information about the benefits that one can receive if a person has a disability. And that also includes the other variables, language, and the written information available. And the people we are talking more about the center's ability to help people in Spanish or give information in Spanish.

The other issue, or the other barrier, is that the community sometimes needs to be more confident in reaching out to organizations. We want to tell them that people who call our regional centers, the ADA National Network, can call toll-free at 1-800-949-4232. All calls are free, and all calls will be confidential. So, we will not share your information. an additional hour to get to a center where they think they will be assisted in Spanish or have an organization they trust. A final one is that I these barriers we are seeing are something to consider; we are trying to inform the public about their rights under the ADA and the other rights under different laws for people with disabilities.

**Angelica Deaton:**
Well, you have already answered a lot of this, but to make it a little more specific and clearer problems?

**Oscar Gonzalez:**

We can continue to give our ideas and knowledge about the programs they are listening to in their communities. As we mentioned, each region is different. Still, each of us is hearing different situations that are happening or examples, and because we are all over the United States, in our regions, we are not all working in the same place; it is important for us to know about the needs that are in our areas. So, for example, if a region of the National Network has already had experience with an issue, they will have the answer for another region that may be just right now. So, all of us are working to reach out to local organizations that offer services to Spanish-speaking people to give them more information about the ADA. Then, that information can be given to their families or those who visit that organization. We are also open to other organizations if they have a Spanish-speaking audience to contact us directly and if they also want to learn more about the ADA because the more people we know about the ADA and the rights that this federal law gives, the better that the people in our community who could have access to their services and resources.

**Angelica Deaton:**

Perfect, yes, knowing where the information is and how we can apply it is important. How will it change and improve the lives of Hispanics with disabilities?

**Oscar Gonzalez**

Well, summarizing everything we have discussed, especially ADA titles. It is important to know that the ADA is essential for the community and allows them to exercise their rights, access services, advocate for inclusion, and participate in society independently and knowing the rights that one has. It opens the doors for people with disabilities.

**Angelica Deaton:**

Oscar, thank you very, very much. It has been wonderful to talk to you today. Thank you for
this valuable information you have shared with our listeners, especially what the Multicultural Outreach Committee and the ADA National Network do.

Today, we have explained how this committee reaches out to the Hispanic community to teach us about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other disability-related topics. However, before we finish, do you have any final thoughts or useful resources that you want to share with us today?

Oscar Gonzalez:

Well, first I wanted to tell you that it's been a pleasure to be here today and yes, we've talked a lot about the rights that you have under the ADA about services and access to places open to the public and places of employment, but what if you've faced discrimination? if you have a disability?

So, at the federal level, there is the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which is the EEOC, and they are the ones who take the workplace complaints.

DOJ complaints and they only take complaints for government services and places that are open to the public, and we also have one more additional resource, which is the Job Accommodation Network called JAN and they are the ones who give information and examples of reasonable job accommodations in the workplace. place of employment under the ADA.

Angelica Deaton:

Well, this is great news and hopefully we will have more and more resources and reach more and more families and we will not forget all these resources and these organizations that Oscar has shared with us today that can have a lot of information that can be very useful to us and above all, learn more about the Americans with Disabilities Act. And how these laws cover us

Listeners who have questions about the ADA or other disability-related topics can find help speaking to someone in Spanish at the ten ADA regional centers by calling 1-800-949-4232 or visiting the website at adata.org.
Oscar, thank you so much for being with us today and for sharing this important information.

Listeners, thank you for joining us for this episode celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. We discussed how the Multicultural Outreach Committee and the ADA National Network connect with and teach the Hispanic disability community about their rights under the ADA.

You can access all ADA programs live! Episodes with archived audio, accessible transcripts, and resources on our website at ADAlive.org.

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Do you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)? Use the online form anytime at ADAlive.org or contact your ADA Regional Center at -800-949-4232. All calls are free and confidential.

ADA Live! is a program of the Southeast ADA Center, Syracuse University's Burton Blatt Institute, and a collaboration with the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Inclusive Employment Policies for People with Disabilities. Our producer is Celestia Ohrazda, with Cheri Hofmann, Mary Morder, Marsha Schwanke, Chase Coleman, and Barry Whaley. Our music is from 4 Wheel City, the Movement for Improvement.

We invite you to join our companion podcast, Disability Rights Today, for in-depth discussions on important court cases shaping the rights of people with disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Learn more and listen to disabilityrightstoday.org.

See you in the next episode!

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