CLAWS AND WINGS:
AN ORAL HISTORY EXPLORATION OF DISABILITY IN DELAWARE 1917-2017

Transcription of video recorded July 20, 2017
Interviewer: Kim Burdick, MA, MPA (Referred to hereafter as KB)
Interviewee: Jill Fredel (Referred to hereafter as JF), Director of Communications for the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services
Topics included: Pathways to Employment, Communication, *Olmstead Decision*, IDEA
Run time: 41:20

* * * * * *

JF: I'm Jill Fredel. I'm the Director of Communications for the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services.

KB: Tell about where you grew up and how you got here.

JF: Sure, sure. So I grew up in Wisconsin, and went, went to high school there, and went to college there at the University of Wisconsin. I've always been interested in social services and most of my career was spent in journalism, which is a different kind of social services. It's really informing the public and helping them to make their own decisions. And I spent about 30 years in journalism at newspapers across the country, Wisconsin, Michigan, Arkansas, Florida, Virginia, you name a state I've probably been there. And then about 6 years ago I left the paper and came to work at the Department of Health and Social Services and I tell people I have moved to the other side of the fence. And now I help people directly, Now people who call our offices…just had a woman who is homeless, had lost her ID, knew that she had given it to one of our state service centers, and she had applied for housing, and could we help her to find her ID?

So that's the kind of direct help that you can provide to people and we're gonna find the ID and get it to her and hopefully she can get housing soon.

KB: And how did you get into social services from the *News Journal*?

JF: Actually, former secretary Rita Landgraf hired me, she was looking for a communications director. And I, I had met her when I interviewed with her I was touched by her compassion and her, and her passion for the work that the department does, and for the department that she led, and I thought, "This is different." This is a point in my life where I wanted to give back and to do public service and I remember coming home from the interview and telling my husband, "I am so jazzed by what I heard." And just that short time in the department and the difference that I thought I could make in people's lives, working with then-Secretary Landgraf and the whole department to help tell their story and help communicate internally with our employees and externally with the people we serve.

KB: So how did you meet her?

JF: Remember, it's… She was looking for a communications director and I had been a volunteer with the Food Bank of Delaware and I had lunch with Pat Beebe, who is still the president and CEO of the Food Bank, and she said, "Rita Landgraf is looking for a

Communications Director. I think you would be perfect." So I always thank Pat Beebe for connecting me with, with Rita and really kind of changing my life.

KB: So, so far…you're pretty new still, right? [JF: That's right! That's right.] What was your defining moment in the history of this field?

JF: Oh, I think the defining moment was working with then-Governor Jack Markell. He had become chair of the National Governors Association and when you are a chair, each governor who's chair is chair for a year, and they pick an area they want to highlight during their one year term as chair. And he decided that he wanted to highlight employment opportunities for people with disabilities. A lot of other governors choose very broad topics like health reform or workforce development or infrastructure, but he wanted to do something more narrowly defined. And he thought it was something, working with the other governors across the country, that he could move the needle and change peoples' lives. So when he got involved with that, his point-person on the whole initiative was Secretary Rita Landgraf and 'cause she's spent more than 35 years in the field of disabilities. And when Secretary Landgraf goes along I go along. And, so I have this just tremendous exposure, not only through her, but also with then-Governor Markell in terms of advancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

And Secretary Landgraf did, was on an interview panel for him. He wanted to hire someone in his office, someone with a disability and ended up hiring a young woman, but there were other young, young people who were interviewed during that time and Secretary Landgraf said, "I'm going to hire someone for our office, too," and she hired a woman named Alyssa Cowin.

Alyssa's still there and she not only changed… You know, I think hiring her changed her life, but I always tell people she changed the culture of our entire, our office, our building, our department, everybody knows Alyssa. She, she knows about people leaving or coming before I do and I'm the Communications Director, so obviously she's an, an ambassador. And she's just… When, when you meet someone, you work with someone with a disability, you know, every day is a blessing to them, is golden to them. And then you think, the little problems you have, they're miniscule compared to what someone with a disability might face. And then you realize, I have this great opportunity with this position and here's Alyssa every day, she just comes to work and she's just excited about what the day can bring, how she can contribute, and that's, that has changed a lot of peoples' lives in our, in our workplace.

And, and that's why I think Governor Markell's initiative was so important, 'cause you see the difference that people with disabilities can make in the workplaces where they, where they end up. And he said, it's not about charity. There's no charity! Alyssa works hard and she gets a lot done. It's not about charity. It's about giving people an opportunity. And Alyssa had sent out, she told me, sent out more than 45 resumes and no, no job interviews and then she got an interview to work in Governor Markell's office and Rita said, "Maybe she didn't get that job, but I, I want her in our office." And she hired her.

So you see the difference that people, you know, I experienced it. I know what it, what it means to me personally, and to our entire office to have someone with a disability work in our office. And it literally has just changed the culture. And, and, and I, you know, my,

my hope, and I have seen this in other states across the country, it, it has changed the culture of a lot of states. Wisconsin governor really embraced this. The South Dakota governor embraced it. He grew up with two, his parents both, both were deaf, so he totally understood what this meant and he just embraced this initiative. And the governors who did saw this as a workforce development.

You have these people with great talents and abilities and we haven't given them enough of these opportunities. And people with disabilities have tremendous track records in terms of, of coming to work every day, of their devotion to what they do, a great responsibility to carry out the work that they have. You know, Alyssa can shred for hours and hours. I would hate shredding! But she loves it and she'll come down and tell me, "I did 11 bags today." And not one complaint about what she did. So you just see, if you can attach people to the right skill, find, determine their skills and find the right position for them that is a match, you have this, this tremendous employee. She's made a difference to the Department of Health and Social Services and she's made a difference in terms of serving the people in Delaware.

I, I can't think of anything better than that, in terms of hiring people with disabilities. So I think what, what I think what Governor Markell did was kind of throw a pebble into a pond and you see these ripples all across the country. That, to me, is a tremendous, a tremendous legacy for him and a tremendous legacy for an initiative that there were some people who didn't want him to pursue it, that they thought it was too narrow of an initiative. And he said, "No, I'm gonna do this." He put his foot down and said this is important. We need to give more people these opportunities for employment. And, and if Alyssa didn't have this job, she'd probably be sitting, sitting at home. And she's talked about starting her own business but she would be watching TV all day. That's…she's got talents and skills and as a society we need to take advantage of those.

KB: So what one thing have you personally done in this field that makes the biggest difference?

JF: Oh, you know, I think, I think it's supporting Governor Markell's initiative and I think it's about talking about the, the talents and the skills that people with disabilities have. I was at an employer and I was volunteering there and I was doing this work. And when I left I talked to the person in charge and I said, "You know. If you hired a person with a disability, they could do this work." I, I really didn't enjoy it that much but I said, "A person with a disability would stand there for hours and do what I just did and it would be a value to you as an employer and it would be a tremendous value to your employees to work with someone with a disability just to kind of open up their eyes to the possibilities and just the inclusive nature of, of our society. You we think, we tend to push people aside who are different to say, people with disabilities or, you know, people who are Hispanic or Latino, you know, refugees, if, if we don't understand them we have a tendency to kind of push them to the side and say, you know, I'll deal with that later.

People with disabilities, they're, it's the same. They're just like you or me. They're people and people I know with disabilities have hopes and dreams and aspirations and just want to be given that opportunity. And I, I think to spend the time in terms of employment just opens up possibilities, further possibilities in terms of inclusion.

I participated in a 5K. It was called "Inclusion Means Everyone." And, there, think about a 5K, you have to, you're walking or running or on a bike, and a woman had participated in a 5K. And she had her son who has a disability, cerebral palsy, and she has a, a jogging bike and he sits in there and she pushes from behind. And she had been involved in a 5K and the organizer said, "You know, we think it's dangerous for you to be out there. You're gonna get in the way of the other runners." She said, "No, I have a perfect right to be here with him. He wants to participate. This is how we do this." And so some other people heard about this, including the owner of a fitness gym, and he said, "Let's start our own 5K, 'Inclusion Means Everyone.'" And we invited people with disabilities whether they, you know, use a different adaptive bike, or they walked more slowly than other people, but it was inclusive. It was people with disabilities, people without disabilities, and I just remember watching people who were being pushed in adaptive strollers and people with adaptive bikes and people in wheelchairs. You know, we all can be physically fit and that was just one of the greatest mornings.

It was on the Fourth of July a couple years ago, and it was just a, just a tremendous experience. And at the end, there was a young woman with a prosthetic leg, and she had, she'd been in a wheelchair and she got near the finish line and she got out of the wheelchair and she was determined to walk across that finish line. And to see that, to see that people just want to participate, they just want an opportunity to participate, I think that, you know…

Everything we do in society kind of rolls from that, whether it's a 5K or employment or bowling or going to the movie theater or, you know, going to Longwood Gardens, everybody wants to be able to participate. Why should we say, you know, why should 5Ks be off-limits or employment be off-limits or education be off-limits? Let's find out what people can do and employ accommodations if needed, but everybody has gifts and talents to share. And we are better when we all share in each others' gifts and talents.

KB: Tell me, you haven't worked in an institution, but how do you define it? What do you see, plus or minus about institutions?

JF: You know, an institution, you know, is a department we, we think there's far greater value in people living in the community, and that's where I want to live. That's where you want to live. And that's where we all want to live. Think about an institution as, base again, where it's people with similar characteristics, whether it's, it's someone with serious and persistent mental illness, it's very acute at that point, but they may be in an institution. Maybe someone with severe developmental disabilities, they may be in an institution. Me… The Department of Health and Social Services operates an institution called the Stockley Center and it's where people now with very severe, challenging developmental disabilities, but at a time, years ago, in the '70s it was at its height, and today we have maybe, I think, 50 or 60 people at the Stockley Center. In the '70s we had up to 700 people, so there were a lot of families who had a, had a child born with a developmental disability and they didn't know what to do. And they didn't know if that was, if they could care for a son or a daughter with a developmental disability.

And I think we started institutions to say, "Look, families. Don't worry. We'll…" The doctor would say, "We'll just put your child in an institution and they'll be well cared for and you can visit." And now that we know today that so many people with disabilities

can live perfectly fine lives in the community. And they may need supports. If you're a person with a serious and persistent mental illness you may need wrap-around services. You may have people check in, make sure you're taking your medication. May help you balance your checkbook. May make sure that you have paid the rent and paid your electric bill. You can live in the community. You can go to the library, you can go to shows down on the riverfront, you can go bowling with your friends. You can do all sorts of things! You don't have to be set aside in an institution.

And, and there's, there's a famous Supreme Court case called the *Olmstead Decision*. Two women, living in Georgia, were in an institution. And they said, "Well, we don't, we don't want to be here. We want to live in the community. We want to get our services in the community." And the Supreme Court said, you are absolutely right, that you should receive your services in the community. You have the civil right to live in the community. You do not have to live in an institution. The state should help you, support you in terms of living in the community, providing the supports and services that you need to live safely in the community. But you have…there's no obligation to the state to keep you in an institution. You do not have to stay there.

We run an institution called the Delaware Psychiatric Center and it's really, it's the core is an acute psychiatric hospital, someone with serious crisis should be there. Just like someone who goes to Christiana Care or St. Francis Hospital with a physical ailment, you don't <u>live</u> at St. Francis. You don't <u>live</u> at Christiana Hospital. You go in, you get your particular illness or injury cared for and then you go home, you go into a rehabilitation center, but you don't <u>live</u> at the hospital. And we don't want people <u>living</u> at Delaware Psychiatric Center. They, they have the right to live in the community. We need to provide services to them in the community, but they should be able to have meals when they want to and do their laundry and stay up late watching TV and in an institution so many of those things are restricted.

You have meal times, you have "lights out," you have "this is time to get up." You have to go to this place for your medical appointment or you have to go that place for your social services appointment. There's so many things they're restricted. Even the coming and going in a lot of institutions can be restricted. And that's, that is not, you know, in agreement with the *Olmstead Decision* or the Americans with Disabilities Act, which said, you know it's 27 years ago today, next week, 27 years ago said people with disabilities have the same rights as people without disabilities. And we need to make accommodations for people, whether it's curb cuts in sidewalks, or someone is working in a, in an office and they need something to overcome a visual impairment, we need to provide that, that type of screen where they can see what on, what's on the screen. Or if it's, you know, if someone's in an institution and they want to leave the institution, we need to provide those wrap-around services to someone in the community.

I think institutions are for people who have those acute experiences or such severe disabilities that they can't live safely in the community. It should really be restricted and it should be… I think that one of the most important things is that people with disabilities should have that choice. They should have that say. They should have self-determination. Even, there are some people with serious and persistent mental illness who may not be healthy enough to make their own decisions but we can get them to a point where they're

healthier, and they, then they can make their own decisions. But they, everyone should have the right to live in the community whether you have a disability or not.

KB: Were you working for the department when ADA and IDEA, when they were passed, or hadn't you started…?

JF: No, I, they didn't start until I think it was 2011. So that's IDEA and the ADA were way before my time and I certainly benefited from then and I think that society clearly we have benefited from each of them. And I was there, I did come to Dover on the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. We had a big celebration here in Dover. It included a video salute from then-Vice President Joe Biden, who'd been just a huge supporter of the ADA during his time in the U.S. Senate and obviously supported and voted for it. But he as a Senator, and just as a human being, he has seen the benefit of the ADA, in Delaware and across the country, the difference it has made in peoples' lives.

You know, think about everything that, that we use in society. Think about the technology we have, the Apple iPads and the iPhones, people with visual impairments have just the ability to communicate more easily because of technology. We have a…there's a young man who works on, in the Apple Store in the Christiana Mall, and he, he is deaf and he is blind, and he works at the… People come in and they're having problems with their iPads or their iPhones and he…it's called a Genius Bar…and he helps people troubleshoot their problems with their technology. And just think about that. And if it were 1960 or 1970 or 1980, well, the Apple Store wouldn't have even existed, but no one would have given him a shot at employment. And here he is, the Apple Store saw this tremendous value in this young man, to be able to probably understand technology on a different level than people without a disability. But here he is, troubleshooting for able-bodied people, that when they bring in, and go, like "Something's wrong. I can't figure it out." And he is able to work with people, you know, probably with an interpreter alongside so he can communicate with the people, or maybe he just taps it out on an iPad, but he's able to help people who are having problems with their technology even though he's got profound disabilities being deaf and being blind. But it has not limited him. And kudos to employers who see the talents and skills in people and say, you know, we should be a more inclusive society.

And that in a lot of ways, we believe that always starts with employment because we all need to be valued in terms of our work, just from a social perspective, and an emotional perspective, but also a job gives us money. And if you have money and you're a person with a disability, you're not reliant on the government for support, whether it's, you know, a benefit through SSI or SSDI or some other federal benefit. You have a paycheck coming in! You can determine how I spend my money and I can pay for my rent and I can pay for my health insurance and I can go out and have fun on a Friday night or I can have lunch with my colleagues during the week. It just gives you that opportunity, that independence, I think, we think that the paycheck is really the, the gateway to a lot of independence in terms of a person's life with a disability. Just a big, just a big breakthrough for them.

KB: How, well, you just said. Have you seen…what other stories can you tell about before and after ADA?

JF: You know, there's a…we have a program Pathways to Employment in the department for young people ages 14 to 25 who are eligible for it to help them in, on the road in terms of either advancing their education, higher education, or getting those first inroads in terms of employment. Getting ready for the, we call it getting ready for the world of work. And I think before the ADA, that didn't even exist and you would have had a lot of the young people who we're supporting today, as I said before, sitting at home with their parents watching TV all day or maybe possibly in an institution with other people with disabilities, playing Bingo or doing crafts or swimming or whatever, whatever they do in an institution. But here today there's a young man just graduated from high school and he wanted to work in, in a restaurant or a hotel or, 'cause interested in the culinary arts. And Delaware Park had an opening for, in their hospitality program and he got a job there. He had, he has a uniform and he, you know, washes dishes and helps with meal preparation and he just could not be happier.

It's like he hit the jackpot at Delaware Park because he has this job that he just adores. And his mother just couldn't be happier because here's a, she sees this passion within her son and he is able to take that passion and go to work every day and get a paycheck and have colleagues and have a place to go and have a purpose in life. And I think before the ADA, we just didn't, we didn't think that was possible or it wasn't important or it wasn't on our radar screen. But after the ADA we see the, just the incredible importance that's associated with the world of work for young people with disabilities, for, for people of any age with a disability. But it gives them that dignity and that respect and the ability to connect with other people.

There was another young man who worked for a company called CAI and he was doing scanning. He had old…the Department of Health and Social Services had old paper documents that we needed to have scanned in electronically and he was a whiz at it. You know, just some people develop a rhythm and he developed that and figured out ways to innovate it, make it go more efficiently, go faster. He was just one of the stars of this program.

And we said, "I think we have another position for you." And within the department we have the Division for the Visually Impaired and has a Materials Center where we translate books, print books into Braille or large type and he, he wanted to work there. And got…went through every process and was hired there and this young man who has autism taught himself Braille. He had no teacher, he taught himself. Then he reorganized the, the entire Materials Center so it was more efficient, more effective. And then-Governor Markell went to visit him and it was just amazing the things he had done just to make that Center work more efficiently, more effectively.

And he was just one of the happiest people. And his mother said that connection to employment, he had been sitting at home, he had no interest in getting a driver's license, wasn't very social. When he started in the world of work he said he wanted to get his driver's license, which he did. He would go out to lunch with colleagues. He was much more social. She said it's just been a tremendous change in terms of his personality and his interactions with other people, having employment. And that's why I think it's so important that, that's such a key for so many people is to have that opportunity.

Here's a young man just flourishing because someone saw some skills in him and gave him the opportunity. And now his life has changed, his family's life has changed. And, and we see that a lot with young people. It's not only the young person who changes, but it changes the quality of life for the entire family. And as I said before, it changes the, the culture of the workplace where the person comes in. Just there's so much good that comes from it.

And, and the, you know, the barriers are usually so insignificant. Someone with a disability, the average cost for an accommodation, if someone needs an accommodation, is $500. You know, if they need a large-print screen or some other accommodation, that, that's what the average is to an employer. And usually there are ways that tax credits or things that can offset that cost, but think of all the value that, that young man at the Materials Center has brought to his office and to the people he works with. And think about the young man at Delaware Park and how he's, having that job has changed his life and his mother's life and the lives of all the people he works with. I mean, that's a small price to pay for employers to have that kind of return, and that…return on their investment. That's what Governor Markell used to talk a lot about is the return on investment. The, the upfront cost, maybe the $500 in accommodations or going through the hiring process, it's a small price. But the return on your investment is so great.

He'd, he would always tell the story about Walgreens, huge, obviously huge company, has distribution centers all across the country. They have a distribution center in Connecticut. And you have to work the forklifts. They hired several people with hearing impairments, either deaf or a hearing impairment, to operate the forklifts. And what they found was that people who had, were deaf or had hearing impairments, were much more efficient, had greater safety records than the people who had no problems with their hearing, I mean 'cause they didn't get distracted by noises in the distribution center. It just didn't bother them!

And Walgreens was, is such a champion today and was a champion then. And a lot of their distribution centers, they have hired up, up to as, as many as 50% of the people in a distribution center may be people with disabilities. They are just strong, such strong believers in the return on their investment. They see it. They see it in the low absentee rates, the low turnover rates, just the ability to be trained and stick with it. They just see just a tremendous return on that initial investment. So they are just big believers in the value of hiring people with disabilities and the value it brings to their entire workplace. I can't say enough about them as a company. There are lots of good companies in Delaware and across the country that follow that same path.

KB: So, what else would you change to make their lives better?

JF: Oh, my goodness! I mean, I think that's a really good question for people with disabilities, but I know what I hear from them and one of the biggest things is transportation. And I think we're gonna see innovation in our country in terms of transportation, Alyssa rides paratransit, lots of people with disabilities ride paratransit every day. And it's difficult when you are picking someone up with, either at their home and taking them or picking them at work, up at work, and taking them to their home, or in the morning when they pick her up at home and take her all the way to work, it's doorstep to doorstep. And you know what traffic is like in Delaware. You can hit

bottlenecks, you can… One accident ties up everything. The thing about someone who has to get to work by a certain time and you're late and you don't have any control over that or you drop off three people before they drop you off.

Alyssa's lucky that she has an employer who totally understands the transportation system in Delaware. I mean it's, it's not perfect but I think, as I said, I think that innovation is coming. We're gonna see driver-less cars, so I imagine a day when Alyssa gets into her driver-less car, punches in where she want to go, and the car takes her there and adapts to traffic jams or road conditions or having to take a detour. She just taps it in and off she goes and think, think of that as an innovation! What a breakthrough that would be for people with disabilities not to be dependent on somebody else to take them places they need to go or want to go. And that they have that ability just to hop in a car, punch in the address of where they want to go, and the car takes them.

KB: So, you as a communicator, the answer is "Yes" I'm sure: do you feel that your voice is heard?

JF: Oh, absolutely. I think, you know, in the world of disability I think that communication is so important. We, we participate in a program called Disability Mentoring Day, again for young people to get them, have them have exposure to the world of work. They gather in, have it in each of the three counties, they gather at a host site. They go out to different workplaces for a couple hours and job shadow someone at a workplace, might be a daycare center, might be a restaurant, might be a mechanic shop. It might be a security office. It may be just a regular office. But they go and they have, get the experience of what that workplace is like. And for some people, for some young people with disabilities it's like, "I didn't know a daycare was so noisy. I am NOT gonna do that!"

And that's as valuable as falling in love with the work at, say, a horse farm, where a young person went to a horse farm and said, "I love this." But knowing what you don't want is sometimes almost as valuable as knowing what you <u>do</u> want, that I really <u>do</u> love this. And to have that experience with Disability Mentoring Day, that exposure for young people, is just a great thing. And being able to communicate it, whether it's photos or video of their experiences or sending out a press release and just alerting, not only the greater society, but really trying to target specific employers to say, "Look! Here's an opportunity. There's no strings attached. Just spend a couple hours with a young person with a disability. They get to know you, you get to know them. You see the, you can see the possibilities."

And it started…Senator Coons's office participated in Disability Mentoring Day a couple years ago. They had a young person come and spend some time with them and they ended up hiring that person as an intern and now they regularly hire people with disabilities as interns.

So it's, you can see it changing the workplace just to have that experience. And I think that's, that's a great satisfaction involved with that as a communicator to be able to communicate, whether it's through social media, through Facebook or Twitter just to say, "Here's Disability Mentoring Day" or "Here's Pathways to Employment" or "Here's this…" One of the things we did at the department was put together an 8-minute video featuring five people from Delaware, all with disabilities, cross-disability, who either

have a job right now or, one was a young person, I think she was in third grade, with Down syndrome, who wants to be a teacher or a rock star. [KB: Laughs]

We sent them, we followed the people on their jobs. One, one young man has autism. Kayla has Down syndrome. There's a gentleman who runs a fitness gym and he's got a visual impairment. There's another young woman with Down syndrome who works at a motel. And then we have a woman with serious and persistent mental illness who works as a peer counselor. So we follow them in their positions, or in Kayla's case it was just a sit-down interview, just to talk about their, their hopes and dreams, and what it meant to them to be employed, to have a disability, to be employed and the value it has brought to their lives. And we also asked them for their, you know, words of wisdom for other people who are on that path, who are looking for their first job or second job or a new job and as a, they're a person with a disability. What kind of advice do they have for them? And it was just so, so inspiring to see them at work and see the difference.

You could see the young man who worked at a Walgreens and it's… When you work at Walgreens, when you work in the store, you have to do everything in the store. So he, he unloads trucks, and he stocks the shelves. He may also have to work the front desk. And, again, it's that camaraderie that he has with the colleagues, with his colleagues. Everyone knows Alaric and they all love him in the store and they would do anything for, for him. And, you know, I don't know a lot of workplaces where people have that connection to the…always have that kind of connection to their colleagues.

But there's something about working with a person with a disability that changes them personally and changes the group dynamic of a workplace. And I think that says a lot about the value of hiring people with disabilities to that workplace and then the just incredible value to the individual, to be able to have, to have a job, and a place to go, and a purpose, and a way, a way to share their gifts and talents.

KB: So, if you had a magic wand, what would you change?

JF: Oh, I think, you know, I think the first thing I would change is people's perceptions. You know, I think there's still a lot of stigma attached to the world of disability. That people think they won't be able to communicate with someone with a disability, or, I feel awkward. I don't know if I hold the door for someone who is blind. Do I, you know, do I have to talk louder? I think some of those things that we think have been left in the dust still exist and people, I mean, we're more alike than we are different. And that's what I tell people, you know, if you're not sure what to do: ask, ask the person. You know, Alyssa will tell you exactly what she wants or needs or anybody with a disability in… Someone is deaf, you know, write them a note! You just figure out a way that you can communicate with someone.

I think that stigma is still there. And, and I think, attached to that stigma is, people have low expectations for people with disabilities. I have high expectations. You know, I think we should have high expectations for everyone. You know, if your expectations are low, people are likely to meet those low expectations. You set 'em high, and help people reach those high expectations, expect a lot. We should expect a lot from each other in all of our relationships, whether personal, workplace related or faith-based related, or whatever it is. We should have, we should have high expectations and they should be no different for a person with a disability.

If I had a magic wand I would just, I would want to erase peoples' prejudices or biases toward people with disabilities. I just want to, like, wipe that out of their, out of their brains and say, "Just, just treat people like people."

And we're all people, and we, we are more alike than different. And don't, don't see the disability. Just see the person.

KB: So, if somebody was gonna write your biography, or something, what would you like people in the future to know about you?

JF: Oh, my goodness. You know, you know when you leave a park, you're always told to leave the park better than you found it? And I hope people would write that about me. That I left the world that I lived in better than I found it.

KB: Thank you very much. [JF: You're welcome.] Anything else you want to add for the good of the cause?

JF: No, I just, I know this isn't [unclear]. I'm just so appreciative of this project. I think it's, I think oral histories are important to collect. And I think the world of disability needs this kind of oral history and needs people to understand. You know, I, I don't even know why I'm associated with project, 'cause I, I've spent very little time… You know, people like Pat Maichle and Rita Landgraf who've spent their lives working in this field and supporting people with disabilities. I mean, they're, they're the pioneers, the trailblazers, and I'm just coming in on the tail end, associated with them. And they have made so much difference in terms of peoples' lives. I'm just a great admirer of Rita and Pat and Governor Markell, people who have just changed the way that we see people with disabilities, that we experience our lives with them.

I know my life is just so much richer from working with Alyssa. And it's just opened my eyes to other people with disabilities and opened my eyes to the possibilities. So thank you for this project because now my hope is that it will reduce that stigma, increase the awareness of the gifts and talents that people with disabilities have that can be shared with all of us, and we can, in turn, can share our gifts and talents with them.

You know, one of my favorite things is going to the movies with Alyssa and her friend and then we just, you know they love animated movies, and every once in a while I find an animated movie I like, and then the three of us go out and see the movie and we go out to lunch afterward. And that's, you know, that's just, that's something I wouldn't have done before she started working with us. And we just hired a new Manager of Internal Communications and I can already tell that Alyssa is changing his life, too.

So, it's, it's just a blessing to work with people with disabilities. I hope, I hope in the future I work with more people with disabilities and I hope this video helps to clear that path and, and we have a just more inclusive society 'cause there… People with disabilities have so much to share.