Pivot: Seizing the Opportunity

Cindy Liu
California Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition



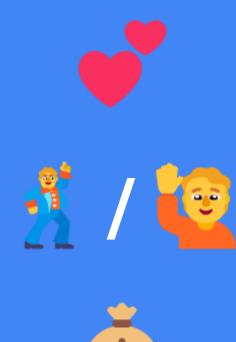
Kelly Kulzer Reyes
California Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition





4 Things To Follow

that will help identify the opportunities







Find an issue(s) you are passionate about.

- Cindy: Access and Equity
 - Safe: public safety and access to criminal justice system.
 - <u>Educated</u>: K-12 and Postsecondary
 - <u>Employed</u>: Equitable pay and systems of support

- Kelly: Adulthood
 - **O EMPSA**
 - CA: Regional Center system
 - Self Determination Program
 - Financial stability: ABLE
 - Belonging



Find the people.

- Federal
 - Know <u>your</u> Congressional and Senate Reps and their staff (link here)
 - Tap into NDSC reps
- State
 - Know <u>your</u> state reps Assembly and Senate (links here for CA as example)
- Committee Members State and Federal (might not be your rep)
- Local
 - County, City, School Board, Community College Board, Hospital/Health
- Allies who is already doing advocacy?

No permanent friends, no permanent enemies.



Be the person, dare to say "yes".

- Take advantage of election seasons
 - Organize and attend candidate forums, meet and greets
 - These are great ways to make disability issues election issues
 - o "off season" organize and then mobilize
- Invited to speak?
 - Say "yes"
- Invited to share input?
 - Say "yes"
- Invited to serve on a task force, a master plan committee, city commission related to your area of advocacy focus?
 - Say "yes"

Representation Matters!

Get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Follow the money.

Public entities that use taxpayer money are required to have some form of transparency on how the money is being spent.

- Get to know the annual budget, strategic/master plans, etc.
- Start at the top have general knowledge of budget cycles
- Understand the "legacy"/compliance documents of local agencies
 - For example, every school district in CA has to do an LCAP (Local Control Accountability Plan), and every school site has to do a SPSE (Strategic Plan for School Excellence) - this follows the state budget cycle
- Follow federally and state funded disability agencies
 - They set their annual priorities and seek public input

Public accountability for public funds!

Budgets reveal priorities and values.

Pivot

What the heck does that mean?

"Small" Pivot =

issue to issue within the same system.

"Small" Pivot Kelly: Staff check-ins and EMPSA (Eliminating Marriage Penalty in SSI Act)

- Called my Congressional representative's office
- Connected with the staffer assigned to disability
- Offered to provide input, share about life with disability in our district
- Mentioned marriage penalty noticed interest in staff's voice
- Told that story
- Found an "in"
- https://www.bakersfield.com/news/valadao-proposes-bill-to-eliminatemarriage-penalty-for-disabled-receiving-benefits/article_1629caf8-ba43-11ee-babf-475dd686de27.html



From left, Rep. David Valadao; Michi Gates, the executive director of Kern Regional Center; Kelly Kulzer-Reyes, a parent of a Kern Regional client; and Tracey Mensch, the president of the Kern Regional Board of Directors; took a tour of the center Tuesday and discussed Social Security marriage penalties for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Melanie Nguyen / For the Californian

"Big" Pivot =

from issue to issue and system to system

"Big" Pivot Cindy: AB 447 in California

- Was not getting traction with school district
- Followed my heart on education and attended meeting put on by state educators
- Joined them on advocacy journey
- The power of +1
 - Coalition building with state agencies and advocates
 - Inclusive College Alliance
 - WeBelong: Everywhere

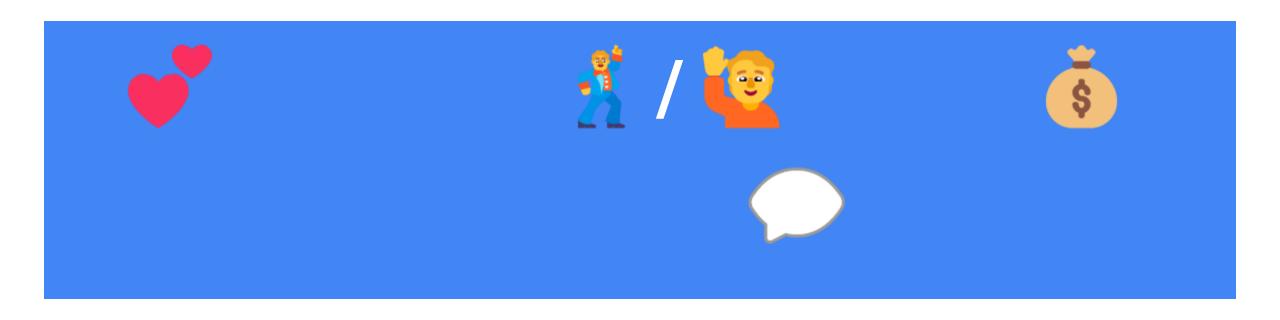
AB 447 was adopted and signed into law in 2023 by Governor Newsom!

- Lessons Learned:
 - difference between budget and legislative asks
 - helps a lot to have a policy person who knows the 'tea" and the process
 - the art of coalition building
 - o sometimes it's big steps forward, sometimes it little can't tie my efforts to outcomes
 - o it's a LONG walk

PListen to the marratives.

Lessons Learned

- Do not tie outcomes to your efforts
 - Advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint
- The Power of +1
- Protect your mental health it's ok to pause and come back!
- Be mindful of performative acts and know when/how to leverage to increase impact and/or hold accountable...to bring up the conversation
- Pivoting often means being able to work with people who may be different from yourself
 - Check your biases Harvard's Implicit Bias tests



...and that's how you pivot.