

Pivot: Seizing the Opportunity

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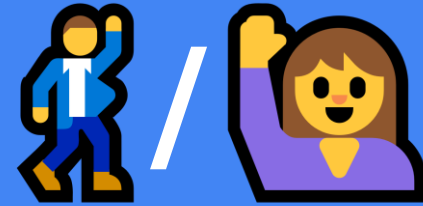
Kelly Kulzer Reyes

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.
- Educated: K-12 and Post-secondary
- Employed: Equitable pay and systems of support

● Kelly: Adulthood

- EMPSA
- CA: Regional Center system
 - Self Determination Program
- Financial stability: ABLE
- Belonging



Find the people.

- Federal

- Know **your** Congressional and Senate Reps and their staff (link here)
- Tap into NDSC reps

- State

- Know **your** 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
 - “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-eliminate-marriage-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
 - sometimes it’s big steps forward, sometimes it little - can’t tie my efforts to outcomes
 - it’s a LONG walk



**Listen to the
narratives.**

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.