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**SIMON BUEHRER:** Welcome to *Inspiring Change* from OCALI, our monthly forum of stories and connections from our ongoing work of inspiring change and promoting access for people with disabilities. I'm Simon Buehrer.

**CHRIS WOLF:** This is about opportunity. This is about integration. This is about inclusion. This is about a person's life and the quality of that life.

**CHRIS FILLER:** This is just part of the evolution of individuals with disabilities being, first of all, not even recognized, not even welcomed, not even a part of their community.

**BRITTA HOUGH:** How do we build a better community together? And that doesn't have to be disability specific. And it's actually probably better when it's not disability specific. [Ambient noise of people attending the summit ]

**UNKNOWN** And I was like, wait a minute--

**ATTENDEE:**

**SIMON BUEHRER:** On May 14, OCALI and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities hosted a day-long summit for provider agencies across the state who work with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. There are hundreds of these agencies who provide employment support and guidance, community engagement opportunities, and many other services for thousands of Ohioans.

**CHRIS WOLF:** It's just about organizing and hitting it just right and getting everybody what they want. And what you finally realize is people just want to talk and tell their story and hear other people's story and learn from mistakes and learn from wins.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Absolutely.

**CHRIS WOLF:** And that's really what it comes down to.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Over the last seven years or so, these provider agencies and many others across the nation

have seen significant changes in their business model and practices as they transition towards community employment as the preferred outcome for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

**TIFFANY MARTIN:** If you look 50 years ago, 20 years ago, 10 years ago, we'd need to continue to evolve--

**SIMON BUEHRER:** That's Tiffany Martin from Goodwill Columbus. Part of the evolution that Tiffany is talking about is the move from facility-based services to community-based services. You may be familiar with what are sometimes referred to as sheltered workshops, usually a designated space where people gathered to perform various tasks, such as stuffing envelopes, sorting hardware, or shredding documents. Often, these workers are paid for the number of items completed or produced-- a finished bag of screws, nuts, and bolts, for example-- and often compensated less than the standard hourly minimum wage, which is currently \$8.55 in Ohio.

**STACY COLLINS:** And so that was typically what people, individuals with disabilities, did when they were done with school is they would go-- it's typically a sheltered workshop is the term that most people know.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** That's Stacy Collins from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. We'll hear more from her in a minute. Many provider agencies, families and communities have historically envisioned and promoted sheltered workshops as *the* vocational option for people with developmental disabilities. These workshops were certainly innovative in their day, especially at a time when employment opportunities were limited, and an important part of the employment trajectory for people with disabilities.

**STACY COLLINS:** We've often, as a system, have created programs and places for individuals to go. And what we're really trying to do is to shift the expectations about what we feel people can do with disabilities, as well as having different conversations with individuals and families about what they're interested in and their needs and that we create services that can center around or circle around a person and their family. And that isn't just us creating programs. So it is about the person, their preferences, their interests, their needs. What does somebody want out of life? What are their goals? And that we have a system that can support them.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** In March 2012, former governor John Kasich signed an executive order which officially launched the Ohio Employment First initiative. As already mentioned, this order made community employment and individual choice the preferred outcomes for people with

disabilities.

**STACY COLLINS:** Really help individuals thrive in their communities, if that's their choice, is to get the services that way or to get supports that way so that they could have a meaningful life.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** It really comes down to a revisioning of employment for people with disabilities and cultivating an environment and culture that provides families and individuals with more options and more choices in their communities. Here's Tiffany Martin again.

**TIFFANY MARTIN:** Everybody has a right to be part of our community. And everybody has a right to have a voice. We want to give that to everybody we serve. And we'll continue on that path until we're successful.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** The May 14 event, called the Transformation Summit, was intended to help Ohio's provider agencies as they continue to work through this systems change process.

**STACY COLLINS:** In Ohio, we have close to 700 providers doing adult day and employment services. And doing one agency at a time, we were really struggling to get to everyone who needed assistance or wanted assistance. And so the summit was our way to bring providers together, to have them get the technical assistance that they were asking for and needed.

**CHRIS FILLER:** The initial response is, why are we doing this? We don't need to do this. We don't need to change. Why would you want to do this? And now, the questions are, how can we do this? I need help knowing. I need to know what steps I can take. So it's gone from being a resistance that this is not a good idea to, this is a good idea, but I'm just not sure how to do it. And that is a huge shift.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** That's my colleague Chris Filler from the Lifespan Transitions Center here at OCALI.

**CHRIS FILLER:** One of the other barriers we see is that it's a different skill set for a provider that is supporting someone in the community, oftentimes, than supporting them in a facility-based setting. So we have to look at what we're doing to help the providers actually have the skill set, the knowledge, the confidence to be able to move into the community. And so again, that is something that is going to take time. We have not necessarily done that across the board.

**STACY COLLINS:** A lot of questions came in about, OK, we're willing to change, but can you show us the model? We hear you. We understand what you're saying, but we don't know actually how to put it into action. We have amazing providers across Ohio who are really trying to do and are doing

great for individuals and really creating that model. But when you're really trying to have a flexible system that, yes, has its requirements, but is centered around the person, there really isn't one model necessarily that's going to work, because you aren't really creating a program for people or individuals to fit into your program.

You're creating a agency that delivers a variety of different services that should be able to bend and move with the person, all while knowing that those services are intended to try to help the person get as independent or engaged in their community as possible. And so there really isn't that one model. And I think that we all are trying to take care of individuals and support individuals and families the best way that we can that you want that model-- just tell me how to do it and I'll do it. It just isn't that easy.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** As with many large, layered, fluid, and multifaceted programs, there's no one size fits all, no plug and play package, no off the shelf solution to help with the transformation process. It's complicated. It's challenging. It's continuous. It's life. There are many factors and situations and interests and policies and funding and people and families and communities involved here. So what's a provider agency to do?

**STACY COLLINS:** Our closest way that we could get to this show us the model was to connect providers to providers so that they could see how providers were having different conversations with individuals, how they were being flexible to individuals, and then how they were delivering service in kind of a non-traditional way that we knew it, so that other providers could have the opportunity to start seeing the bright spots in those bright spots that we saw and grab what they want. Because again, there is not just one model. And so it was our attempt to start having that more collaboration and sharing amongst providers in Ohio, because you're going to learn from each other.

**CHRIS WOLF:** This will be the third transformation summit that I've been helping to facilitate. And definitely, everyone here is onboard. There isn't anyone trying to learn about what transformation is. Are we really doing transformation? So the theme is everyone's got buy in.

Other theme is, for the most part, the start and the stop, the fits and the starts. We're moving forward, and then we kind of hit a little bit of a roadblock, but we just keep moving forward. We regroup. So we talk a lot about, this isn't going to be smooth. It's just keep moving forward, keep finding your resources, and that's OK. So I think people appreciated hearing, OK, it wasn't only us who stumbled.

**BRITTA HOUGH:** We have people in the state of Ohio that are innovative, that are thinking outside of the box, that are doing really great things, and we also have a group of people that wants to do it together. And that right there is, for me, the sweet spot and how we're going to get things moving forward.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** That's Britta Hough from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. Before that, we heard from another Chris-- Chris Wolf. He's one of the Transformation Summit facilitators. As Chris Wolf mentioned, he's worked as a facilitator for three years, so he's had a frontline view of the transformation process and a good perspective on where provider agencies are and where they're going.

**CHRIS WOLF:** It is a lot about getting the buy in. And that feels like a manipulative word, so it's not that. It's sharing the purpose. It's expressing the why. I think everyone said, it's going to be tough. Folks are going to question change.

So you've got to find that purpose and that why to really lean into. It can't be just because I said so or because the rules are this. This is about opportunities. This is about integration. This is about inclusion. This is about a person's life and the quality of that life. Those things resonate for folks who are in this field. And that's where you really want to come at it.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** It's a tall order, and not just for the individual provider agencies, but for the entire support system. Speaking of tall, this is Scott Marks from the Ohio Association of County Boards. He's very tall.

**SCOTT MARKS:** All of us here who are really kind of working to support inclusion, independence for people with disabilities, that means that we're always working to progress a support system forward. And that, oftentimes, can be a big challenge when you've got 88 county boards, hundreds to thousands of provider agencies, and thousands and thousands of people with disabilities who are all obviously unique and different from each other and want different things, need different things.

And we're all just kind of trying to work responsibly to have a system that supports a good life for people. It's something we all believe in very much. When you have such a big system, it's just a difficult thing to do.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** The Ohio Association of County Boards works on behalf of, and represents, all 88 county boards of developmental disabilities. So Scott has a good perspective on what's happening

across the state of Ohio, from policies and legislation to funding to what's happening on the ground.

**SCOTT MARKS:** So a lot of big policy changes that really all have very noble and exciting goals for folks, which are, again, more opportunities, more options, more choices, more ways to pursue the good life of your choosing and having the supports you need to get there.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** At the end of the day, it's really about trying to understand the individual needs, interests, and aspirations of people with disabilities, and then coordinating and orchestrating all these various and moving parts and people and policies and systems and funding to provide the best situation and opportunities, to support the best outcomes, the best life possible. And again, it starts with shifting and changing expectations. Here's my colleague Chris Filler.

**CHRIS FILLER:** If you have gone on most of your life with the expectation that you will not work or that you will not be in the community or that you don't have something unique to offer, you will rise to that expectation. But if it is something where you know that the vision for the future is and can be really endless and it doesn't stop and that you do have a contribution, you are going to rise to that expectation.

So part of this is truly helping people have different expectations than we've had in the past. And unfortunately, those expectations have often been driven by available service models. And so I think that what Stacy described about sort of the change in service model is really helping, or even sort of requiring us, to change that expectation.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** It's about changing expectations. And it's about the conversations we have with each other and our communities.

**BRITTA HOUGH:** You have to speak the language of the community. We, as a system, speak a different language. And we go out and lead with system language specific to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. And it isn't aligning with the language that the community uses. So just the word community integration is in itself, right? We don't say, I'm going to "integrate in my community tonight." "I'm going to go on an outing" or "go do community integration." We don't say that.

When we're out talking and making relationships with business owners, with the HR department, with the volunteer coordinator, with the Parks and Rec department at the local rec center, leading with community discussions and not system charity type of discussion, really

changing and shifting that focus to-- how do we build a better community together?

And that doesn't have to be disability specific. And it's actually probably better when it's not disability specific, and we really do just focus on building and creating opportunities for people to share their gifts and also contribute and have that meaningful, valued role within the community.

**CHRIS FILLER:** In the past seven years, we've seen this change. But you go back much further. This is just part of the evolution of individuals with disabilities being, first of all, not even recognized, not even welcomed, not even a part of their community. Families kept them inside.

Oftentimes neighbors didn't even know that they had a child with a disability. And over the course of time, advocates, families, individuals really pushed that envelope to be offered education. I mean, any education. First, it was in a segregated school. Then it was welcoming into the public schools.

So this is really that evolution. It is a civil rights movement in many ways. So that is exciting, too, to think of it as being a part of something that's much bigger than just what's happening with you and your agency or you and your family or even you and your state. It's that next step that we need to go to truly embrace and give people with disabilities that enviable life that they deserve. They need that chance, just like the rest of us.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** You're listening to *Inspiring Change* from OCALI. I'm Simon Buehrer. We've been talking with leaders and attendees who took part in the 2019 Transformation Summit, a daylong event that took place in May and focused on the ongoing work of helping provider agencies across the state as they work towards helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities move towards community membership and community employment.

In an anonymous response to the event evaluation, one attendee wrote this. "One of the better training sessions that I have attended in my 27 years in this field. This program helped me to understand the distinction between privatization and transformation. They are clearly very different.

Chris Wolf presented and facilitated the concept of transformation in a very convincing and non-threatening way. Through anecdotal presentation and discussion by several other providers in our group, I came away with a better understanding of person-centeredness and experienced somewhat of an epiphany moment on this topic. I am now motivated to conduct a

full assessment and develop a transformation plan."

In a phone interview after the summit, another attendee, Elizabeth Wietmarschen from the Children's Home of Cincinnati, said this--

**ELIZABETH** I've been going to the transformation summits since it first started. And I felt like this past one--

**WIETMARSCHEN:** it really just lit a fire under a lot of people. It was such a positive experience. It talked about problem solving and how we can celebrate these small successes in an arena that is always changing and evolving. And it's difficult to try to see the good in all of that. And I feel like this Transformation Summit really capitalized on all the good things that we're doing, as well as things that we're trying to change for the betterment of the clients that we're serving.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Plans are currently underway for another transformation summit in the spring of 2020. You can learn more about the Employment First initiative at [ohioemploymentfirst.org](http://ohioemploymentfirst.org). You may have noticed that our discussion is missing some key voices-- those people who are the direct recipients of the services offered by provider agencies, the individuals themselves, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We're going to feature some of these voices and cover some of their stories in an upcoming episode of *Inspiring Change*. As far as the Transformation Summit goes, at the end of our discussion, Stacy and Chris Filler talked about making sure these voices are included as part of next year's event-- and beyond-- as all of this work continues.

**STACY COLLINS:** ...Quiet right now. They're so quiet that we just need to help empower their voice, because this is really about them.

**CHRIS FILLER:** Even if they didn't attend the whole day or were not able to, to come in and to participate-- we've just never empowered people like that, so they're not prepared to.

**STACY COLLINS:** So that's kind of a next year ite--- I'm right there with you

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**STACY COLLINS:** That we need to think about.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Thanks for taking a walk with us through this episode of *Inspiring Change* from OCALI our monthly forum of stories and connections from our ongoing work of inspiring change and promoting access for people with disabilities. Join us for our next episode. We're going to the



fair.

**ALICIA SHOULTS:** Sensory-friendly morning is something that we wanted to do just to make the fair a little friendlier. If it's a simple thing like turning down the lights and sounds just to make the fair a little more inclusive and accessible.

**KEIA GRAY:** Normally, we'd only really be out here for maybe an hour or two. But because of the sensory room, we can stay longer and--

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Really? Yeah.

**SYDNEY** Down to the ones closer to us, we would hit about an hour, two hours or so, and head out. And

**BRAVERMAN:** this has been awesome.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** We'll profile the first ever sensory-friendly morning of the 166th edition of the Ohio State Fair. Don't miss it. Subscribe to *Inspiring Change* wherever you get your podcasts. And if you or someone you know needs an accessible version of this podcast, visit [ocali.org/podcasts](http://ocali.org/podcasts) and click on the link to *Inspiring Change*.

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