Position Statement Regarding Ableism

The meaning of ABLEISM is discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities (retrieved 4/26/2023 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ableism>). This occurs either intentionally or unintentionally due to internal biases based on stereotypes or misguided beliefs about people with disabilities. People with disabilities encounter ableism daily. The NV SILC condemns ableism in every form.

We are tired of people treating adults with disabilities like children, making economic assumptions about us, ignoring our requests, disregarding our opinions, and dismissing us as unable or less able than them. Whenever someone makes decisions for us without consulting us, they assume they know better. This is, of course, false.

I know what is best for me. I do not assume to know what is best for you. It is not unreasonable to expect to be treated with respect by others, regardless of how well I can speak, walk, hear, see, or otherwise appear to function. Disability rights are human rights.

We also understand that oftentimes people are unaware they have ableist attitudes or that they unintentionally discriminate. In the same way microaggressions can be harmful to other minority groups, ableism harms the disability community by reinforcing stereotypes that promote discrimination and the mistreatment of individuals with disabilities on a systemic level. Therefore, it is important to educate those who are ableist when we witness it. The disability community is the largest minority group in Nevada; and yet, there is the least amount of awareness surrounding ableism. The SILC strives to educate and inform those who interact with the disability community about ableism so we can eliminate it altogether and be seen and treated with the same dignity and respect as others.

Some Shared Personal Experiences:

Person 1: The belief that “Since the SILC is made up of a majority of individuals with disabilities, we are not as qualified to advocate for the disability community as another group that is made up of health and human service professionals” is ableism and is offensive.

Person 2: I am an adult woman with CP. I have an electric wheelchair and struggle to speak clearly. I also graduated from a prestigious university and own my own business. Just the other day, a leader of a community organization spoke loudly and in a patronizing tone, as if I were a child, when he introduced himself. He also seemed to dismiss me when I attempted to share my background and experience, as if it couldn’t possibly be true.

Person 3: I am an adult woman with autism. I struggle with my job as I work with the public and am exhausted at the end of the day due to all the anxiety and stress that it causes for me. I went to a doctor to explain my difficulty, and she told me “You don’t have autism. You’ll be just fine.” She didn’t even ask to see my previous records or suggest any assessments before she decided that about me, subsequently invalidating me and my feelings, and making me feel hopeless about my situation.