

NAME: CHRISTY BLOEMENDAAL

DISCIPLINE: DISABLED SELF-ADVOCATE

Past/current experiences working in the field of disabilities:

Being late diagnosed with ADHD and Autism and being a parent of a child with disability as well, I have not only personal experience with disability, but professional as well. As an educator, a youth director, and through my organizing and studies in Applied Behavioral Analysis, I encountered disability in numerous ways and was able to approach this area from both very personal and broad scope consideration. As I also began to develop physical disability and chronic pain, another layer of the way the world can create barriers for those of us with disability became evident and I became even more committed to working for change and disability advocacy, which culminated in the creation of The Disability Tangent podcast and the GAIN network to which I now devote my time.

Goals for your LEND training experience:

I hope to use my LEND training experience to gain more insight around policy change and advocacy so that I can more skillfully direct the coalition that I am working to build around accessibility and inclusion. Throughout this year I wish to offer my experience to others as a guide for their future work with disabled persons and their families as well, in whatever way it might offer value for them. I hope to grow as a leader and as a person who seeks to connect and draw individuals together for creating lasting change for all, and I see this as an opportunity to practice the skill and character building necessary to accomplish these long term goals.

What you wish to contribute, in the future, as an advocate/professional/family member in the field:

In the future, I hope to continue to grow the podcast and coalition that I currently share responsibility for with former LEND fellow Dr. Rocco Catrone. As part of this project I seek to create more inclusive space for people to tell their stories and share lived experience, as well as connect and contribute with one another as disabled people and allies to their causes in meaningful ways. This will likely take far more shape during my year with LEND, but I envision a space where we can aid one another in our efforts by providing emotional, physical, and political support, as well as filling in gaps in knowledge and research. It is a big dream that needs more structure, but it is taking off in significant ways and I am thrilled to have the background of LEND to help me along on this journey.