

# Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 2

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living (WNYIL). Our guest today is Todd Vaarwerk, chief policy officer of WNYIL. And I'm your host Ernie Churchwell. Welcome to the program, Todd.

00:00:15 Speaker 1

Always good to be here.

00:00:21 Speaker 2

Not only did you play a pivotal role in the Disability Pride month which we just concluded, but you've got the big overview of things of importance that took place there in.

00:00:30 Speaker 2

What would you like to tell us about disability pride?

00:00:33 Speaker 1

Well, let's just start with the basics. Why is July, Disability Pride month that we're reviewing is based on the fact that July is the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the premier civil rights legislation for people with disabilities. And here in Buffalo on the week of the anniversary

00:00:54 Speaker 1

which is July 26th, there were a number of events that were meant to celebrate

00:01:03 Speaker 1

the diversity of the community of people with disabilities and the contributions that we make to the city. I have actually had the pleasure of being honored by the Common Council on Tuesday of that week, I was very honored to find out that they were honoring me, but it was a statement by them

00:01:23 Speaker 1

to talk about strong advocacy that makes the city more accessible. And that following day was the flag raising for the Disability Pride flag for the City of Buffalo. And at this point for regular listeners,

00:01:39 Speaker 1

I want to be able to give something about the importance of advocacy and the different roles that advocacy can play, because there was a little bit of controversy at the flag raising. WNYIL was actually part of that because we walked away from the flag raising in the middle after the city had done something that it had identified that it wasn't going to do.

00:02:01 Speaker 1

Without getting too detailed into that issue, you can look at our newsletter or the WBFO Disability Desk for more information on that. Suffice to say that advocacy can involve quiet protest.

00:02:17 Speaker 1

You can't, you don't necessarily have to stand for something, in our in our case, it's making sure that if the city makes a promise, they keep it. We left. We issued a statement about why we left and to the city's credit, which I want to make very clear about, we now have a

00:02:36 Speaker 1

stronger working position than we had before the raising of the Disability Pride flag.

00:02:42 Speaker 1

It's my hope that we can move forward with the Advisory Council for people with Disabilities, which was appointed as an Independent Living center member, I'm happy to sit on the Council. So, one of the things we can talk about for just for Disability Pride month in 2024 is the official announcement of the Disability Advisory Panel for the city of Buffalo and we haven't had one of those in a while, almost 12 years now.

00:03:14 Speaker 1

So, we should be very proud about that.

00:03:16 Speaker 2

By the way, could I if I could just sum up the controversy about the Disability Pride flag raising, in the discussions before the flag raising, it was agreed that the event was going to be all about how people with disabilities had managed to lift themselves up from their own difficulties.

00:03:35 Speaker 2

And manage to show what they could achieve. But contrary to the pre-agreement, traditional service provider agency was allowed to the dais and essentially give itself all the

credit for everything that people with disabilities had accomplished, which is exactly 180° away from what had been agreed.

00:03:45 Speaker 1

Right.

00:03:56 Speaker 1

It turned out to be, it turned out to be a communication error which we, as advocates, have worked out with the city, like I said.

00:04:07 Speaker 1

We now have a stronger negotiating position on disability issues than we had prior to the flag raising and I look forward to being able to work with the city on further improvements to accessibility. But like I said, the summary is just the summary. If you have more interest on that, our friend at the WBFO Disability Desk covered it rather extensively.

00:04:28 Speaker 2

Todd, we're totally out of time. I'm sure people will have questions. How can they reach you?

00:04:33 Speaker 1

You can always give me a call here at 716-836-0822 ext. 101 or email me at [tvaarwerk@wnyil.org](mailto:tvaarwerk@wnyil.org)

00:04:45 Speaker 2

Thanks for giving us the big picture, Todd.

00:04:47 Speaker 1

Always a pleasure.

00:04:48 Speaker 2

This has been Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of WNYIL. Our guest today was Todd Vaarwerk, chief policy officer of WNYIL. And I've been your host, Ernie Churchwell.