

In Our Story—Part 1, I shared the origins of New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition and the values that directed our work as a start-up. In this installment, I will share how we became acquainted with other state and national advocates, including caregivers, employers and care recipients and so we could start to build an identity.

After the response from our initial set of Listening Sessions that led to our formation as an organization, we realized that to grow to become a resource organization to caregivers, their employers and other stakeholders, we needed to engage with the many kinds of organizations in New Mexico.

An early connection was with the National Direct Care Alliance (DCA), a national advocacy organization for direct care workers in long-term care, which has since become the National Domestic Workers Alliance. We recommended Board members to their organization and hosted a national Board meeting for the organization. After a couple years of working with the DCA, in 2012, we negotiated a partnership with them to administer the *Personal Care and Support Credential* - a competency-based test for personal assistance workers in home and community-based settings.

To help workers prepare for the Credential exam and because we knew from the field that there was inconsistent training and support for caregivers who were unregulated. As such, we began development of *Customized Training for Caregivers*, a program we developed with nurses, social workers, care coordinators a doctor and employment specialists. The program trains caregivers on the eight core competencies every direct care worker should know before working with a person who is elderly. Many of the skills learned through this training are transferable to those required for working with persons with disabilities. The training helps Home Health Aides, Personal Care Assistants, Direct Support Staff, Family Development Specialists, learn the many skills needing for working in the field. The training also prepares caregivers to sit for and pass the Credential exam. The training was eventually copyrighted.

Also in our early years, we began to enlist the support of state and Federal elected officials and state agency directors. We met with staff of our Congressional members, held a statewide summit to draw attention to the challenges of caregivers, and collaborated with the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) to mark the release of *Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work* – a report shedding light on the labor conditions for one of the fastest growing industries in the country: domestic care. Our growing voice at the state and Federal levels led to strategies at the national and state levels to improve long-term care and the workforce that provides these invaluable services to the people of New Mexico.

Back home, we continued to host “Listening to Caregivers” sessions across New Mexico in places like Santa Fe, Las Vegas, Placitas, Bernalillo, Rio Rancho, Corrales, Española, Carlsbad, Loving, Artesia, and Hobbs and the pueblos of Jemez, Cochiti, Santo Domingo, Santa Clara and also Dulce, NM on the Jicarilla Apache reservation. State legislators of both parties began to attend these sessions to hear from family and professional caregivers on challenges and solutions in caring for clients and family members.

It is difficult to single out any particular organization, business or agency that has been most important to our growth and acceptance of the caregivers’ voices. Three vocal and especially active organizations that supported and educated us—and continues to do so today—are the New Mexico Disability Coalition, AARP-New Mexico and New Mexico Association of Hospice and Home Care. Family and professional caregivers benefit greatly as a result of the active involvement, expertise and commitment of these organizations and their respective leaders.

*Adrienne R. Smith, MPA, is Founder and President/CEO of New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition (NMDCC), a statewide organization that advocates for direct care workers so they may better serve persons who are elderly and those with disabilities. Ms. Smith is an employment and workforce development expert with 20 years' experience at the state, Federal and international levels. She is a 2016 appointee to the Community Advisory Council of the Federal Reserve Bank Board of Governors. She is a 2014 Fellow of the Aspen Institute. Ms. Smith holds a Masters of Public Policy and Administration from University of Texas at San Antonio and a Nonprofit Management Certificate from Georgetown University in Washington, DC.*