



# IOWA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

## COMMUNITY ADVOCACY & SERVICES DIVISION

Government  
Access

Civic  
Engagement

Community  
Connection

Youth  
Leadership

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### One Division, Seven Offices

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[Office of Asian and Pacific Islanders](#)

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[Office of Deaf Services](#)

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[Office of Latino Affairs](#)

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[Office of Persons with Disabilities](#)

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[Office of Native Americans](#)

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[Office on the Status of](#)

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## October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

The 2017 theme for National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is "Inclusion Drives Innovation" to reflect the role that diverse perspectives play in a thriving workforce. Observed each October, NDEAM celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities and educates the public about the value of a workforce inclusive of their skills and talents.

For more information on National Disability Employment Awareness Month, click [here](#).

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## In this month's Let's Talk Human Rights blog:

- *Independence is Employment* by Craig Barnum
  - *We Support Employment 1st* by Page Eastin
  - *Feminism: The Importance of Intersectionality* by Liz Nimmo
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## African Americans

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### Office on the Status of Women

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### **DHR Youth Programs and Initiatives**

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- [Iowa Human Rights Youth Chapters](#)
  - [Iowa Youth Congress \(IYC\)](#)
  - [State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council \(SIYAC\)](#)
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## Our Commissions

Each commission is composed of Governor appointed volunteers. They have specific assigned duties under [Iowa Code](#).

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## **Iowa Department of Human Rights**

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[321 E 12th Street](#), Second Floor  
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<https://humanrights.iowa.gov/cas>

## **Independence is Employment**

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Koan, my youngest son, has global developmental delays. He is ten years old and doesn't walk, talk, or feed himself. No doctor or specialist has been able to tell us why these delays happened. We named him for the answerless riddles or parables that Zen monks meditate upon to reach enlightenment. We gave him

this name before he was born and long before we knew he would face these types of challenges. It is, of course, a very fitting name. While it's been a wild, wonderful adventure raising Koan, I do have some anxiety when I think about what his life will be like after he is finished with school. To be fair, I have two other children who are not disabled, and I worry about them a lot, too.

My three main goals for Koan are happiness, good health, and for him to be as independent as possible. While I don't want to over-simplify anything, these are really the same goals I have for all three of my kids -- including the two without disabilities. These global concepts have really helped my spouse and me in our decision making processes. We are now better able to focus on the important, big-picture items, and we don't get bogged down in the unimportant details and minutia. This clarity of purpose has been one of the many great gifts Koan has given our family.

I've spent a good deal of time thinking about what life will look like for Koan once he completes his K-12 experience. I find that I need to resist the temptation to over plan or over think his future. I certainly do want to be prepared for whatever opportunities he may wish to pursue as he gets older. And, of course, because of his disability, we need to be a lot more thoughtful about his future -- setting up a trust, launching an ABLE spending account, looking into group living options, etc... But, at the same time, I also don't want to pigeonhole him or put him down a path that's not right for him but makes sense to me. Just like my other

kids, he will need to find his own path. We just need to give him space and time to do that. I can provide some guidance, but just like with his brother and sister, it's really up to him to figure out what he wants to do and how to leverage and take advantage his strengths. I merely hope to set up the circumstances to make that possible.

One of the main characteristics of independence, at least in my mind, is employment. Ideally, for Koan this would mean competitive employment. Having a meaningful job not only contributes to financial stability but it, more importantly, gives meaning and purpose. It instills a sense of confidence that only comes from doing real work. That feeling of "mattering" ripples into all sorts of other roles in life that have a tremendous impact on well being, too. Competitive employment is one of my highest and most rigorous aspirations for Koan.

While I'm not ready to lower my expectations, I also need to acknowledge that Koan may not be able to attain the goal of competitive employment if he stays on his current developmental trajectory. And, if he doesn't reach that milestone, I hope that there are other, non-competitive, employment opportunities available for him. A "sheltered workshop" should certainly not be the first choice for anyone with a disability. But, that type of non-competitive environment can provide a great deal of social interaction and meaning if a competitive job were not an option. What I know about Koan as a ten-year-old is this -- he would find a lot of joy working and interacting socially with others even if it were on tasks that others might find less meaningful. So, my hope is that when Koan finishes school he has a full array of options and opportunities available to him. And, again, this is really not all that different than what I want for all of my kids.

If you are interested following Koan's story further, please check out our blog at <https://KoansAnswer.wordpress.com>

*Guest submission by Craig Barnum, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (photo courtesy of Craig Barnum)*

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## We Support Employment 1st

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When people ask me where I work and I tell them that I work in the Iowa Department of Human Rights, I'm often met with looks of intrigue and questions about what my work entails. Some have asked, "Do we still need a Department of Human Rights in 2017?" to which I sometimes answer with a rhetorical question: *Is there still discrimination on the basis of race, religion, disability, national origin, sexual orientation, and gender?*

I realize now that the title of our agency may be unique, but the work we do is not. Across the country human rights advocates work to close the gap. My work is focused on closing the employment gap for individuals with disabilities. In Iowa, as in many states, we have thousands of individuals with disabilities working in segregated employment settings earning sub-minimum wage, dependent on public benefits, and unaware of the resources and services available to support them with moving into competitive integrated employment.

The unemployment rate of individuals with disabilities is more than double the overall unemployment rate. This crosses over into race as well with people of color making up the majority of individuals with disabilities yet having the lowest rate of successful rehabilitation into employment. My work is largely focused on advising the state's Vocational Rehabilitation agency (VR) on policies and the provision of quality VR services. In order to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities as well as the needs of businesses, we must have a well-prepared VR services system in place.

The Iowa Department of Human Rights continues to support the Employment 1st philosophy that all individuals, regardless of disability, can work with the right supports and that competitive integrated employment is the first and preferred outcome for publicly funded employment services for individuals with disabilities. This work happens by supporting agencies with policy development, educating leaders and businesses about the benefits of employing a diverse workforce that includes individuals with disabilities, and creating awareness of the resources and services

available to support individuals who want to work.

We at Iowa's Department of Human Rights focus less on policy enforcement and more on partnering with and educating people with disabilities... Our department tries to spread a message of empowerment to individuals with disabilities. Those with disabilities need to know that they can achieve self-sufficiency and that our workforce needs their talents to support our economy. Through countless conversations and initiatives, Iowa has made progress towards competitive integrated employment for all Iowans. We are aligning policies and practices with the Employment 1st philosophy and relying on individuals with disabilities to help us meet our workforce needs. Our goal is to create an Iowa that is equitable, just, accessible, and inclusive for all Iowans, including individuals with disabilities.

*Written by Page Eastin, [Client Assistance Program](#), [Office of Persons with Disabilities](#)*

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## **Feminism: The Importance of Intersectionality**

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When I was a first year student at Simpson College, I was just getting my start in the world of feminist activism. Before college, I had never even considered myself a feminist. It wasn't until a professor explained to me that feminism was simply a belief in gender equality that I began to label myself "feminist". The same professor inspired me to establish Simpson's first feminist club, in which I have now served as president for the past two years.

With my newfound passion for social justice, I wanted to make a difference on my college campus. The first idea I had was to host an equal pay bake sale. According to the Pew Research Center, women in 2015 earned approximately 83 cents for every dollar men earned. Using this data, I decided I would sell cookies to men for \$1 and to women for 75 cents to raise awareness for wage inequality. I reserved a table at my college's campus center and assembled a group of feminists to help organize the event.

I was nervously enthusiastic for my first event as a feminist organizer and began hanging up posters all over campus to

advertise the bake sale. As I was hanging the posters up, a friend and fellow feminist questioned me about the event. I explained to her the premise of the event, and she asked “Are you going to include the racial wage gap?” I defensively explained to her the event was about gender, not race, and that it would be impossible to cover all wage gaps in this one bake sale. She explained to me the importance of including more factors than gender in my bake sale. She discussed the significance of intersectional feminism. By intersectional, she meant the acknowledgement of the marginalizing experience faced by racial minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and various other groups. My bake sale failed to acknowledge such struggles.

The non-intersectional way to approach the bake sale would be to ignore my friend’s critique and continue on to sell cookies according to gender. The intersectional way would be to acknowledge that the wage gap goes beyond gender and affects more than just white women. I chose the second option which led to important conversations about racial and gender inequality with students who attended the bake sale.

Historically, women of color have been left out of the feminist movement and pushed to the side by white feminists. Movements to benefit the lives of women of color have largely been ignored. For these reasons, it is necessary for feminists to be intersectional in their activism. Not all women are white, heterosexual, or Christian. Accordingly, we cannot participate in activism and claim we are “fighting for women’s rights” if we don’t show up to support other marginalized groups. I’m still trying to learn what it means to be an intersectional feminist and I strongly encourage other feminists to do so. As a community, we can do better.

*Written by Liz Nimmo, Intern, [Office on the Status of Women](#)*

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