

**Project Empower:  
Report- Review and Observations**

**The American experience in  
community empowerment and  
protecting the rights of people  
with disabilities**

Submitted by  
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## General Overview

The project was conducted from September 26<sup>th</sup> thru October 11, 2013 in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the city of Almaty.

The American participants traveled to Kazakhstan to implement the project developed through a collaborative effort with Veniamin Alayev while he was visiting Seattle Washington for his American exchange. Veniamin was supervised through the Office of Civil Rights with the City of Seattle and specifically the Commission for People with Disabilities. Veniamin work from the offices of Commissioner Mark Adreon at the Washington State Department of Services for the Blind.

Veniamin works for a disability focused NGO in Almaty and through a competitive process was selected to participate in the American Councils Project Empower exchange program.

The Project we developed, had three primary goals with goal subsets including hosting the following:

- Community Forum,
- Leadership Forum
- Leadership Summit.

(I will go into more detail on these goals, below.)

In addition to implementing our goal focused forums, we participated in cultural exchanges and scheduled meetings with various disability related NGOs and Societies. We visited 2 NGO district offices, the Women's Society of disabilities, the Blind Society and the Blind Youth Society. (Societies are formed as affinity organizations, generally around a disabling condition.)

We also met with the Vice Mayor of Almaty to, exchange gifts from the Mayor of Seattle and to express our appreciation of hospitality from the City of Almaty.

The cultural exchanges and official project functions supported the sharing of best practices and numerous learning opportunities including:

- learning about each other's cultures,
- the personal and professional lives of people with disabilities,
- peoples aspirations and challenges for advancing equity for PWD,
- actions and programs that have been and/or implemented developed to move disability rights forward,
- potential government support areas for more engagement and opportunities for stronger and more productive partnerships,
- learning about opportunities to work together both at the local level as well as the newly developing international exchange and partnerships.

Our trip to the Republic of Kazakhstan was a valuable learning experience and I found myself learning much more than I had to share.

The City of Almaty was an active and vital urban environment that appeared to be strongly connected to the mountains that surrounded it. The local produce and apples are of high quality and the city offered a wide range of cuisine.

- The people of Almaty were gracious and open. Our meetings in the community were always followed by tea and food. People shared their lives in candid and open expressions.

On our first weekend in Kazakhstan, AliAmanbayev

- Chairperson of Almaty city society of people with disabilities, shared with the American delegation a traditional Kazakhstan meal. The meal included sheep and horse meat prepared in various ways, farm fresh tomato/cucumber/onion salad (often served with meat, dried cheeses, "five fingers and the genuine hospitality of this country.
- We visited the State Museum of Musical Instruments, a Russian Orthodox Church, war memorials, city parks, mountain areas that included a village of Yurts, a trout farm for fishing, sidewalk vendors and the Green Market as well as sampling classic Kazak and Russian cuisine. All of these excursions and cultural exchanges brought us insight and learning opportunities for the history and culture of Kazakhstan.
- In the State Museum we saw an exhibit that expressed the pride and journey of the Kazakhstan government since liberation 25 years ago. This current history was illustrated through diplomatic gifts and letters to the President of Kazakhstan who has been in that office since liberation or 25 years. This exhibit along with others illustrated the pride and rich history of the republic.

Through this project, we enriched each other's cultural experience and challenged us to move toward working for full inclusion for PWD throughout Kazakhstan and connecting us all to a movement without national borders.

## **Project Goals -Review-Observations-Outcomes**

**Goal 1** Provide an opportunity for people living with disabilities to bridge differences through connection by discovering issues of mutual concern in an open Public Forum.

*Focus goal:* Empower individuals within various disability communities to work together to create change. Recording their experiences for potential messaging when promoting disability issues to policymakers, brings the peoples voices to government.

*Targeted goal:* Empower people to action.

### Review:

*Rationale:* The Public Forum is designed to provide a venue for people from across many disability communities to come together as members of a larger community. It provided the opportunity for people to speak on their own behalf and not through a case worker or other intermediary. By creating a safe space where people can voice their personal concerns, the hope is that the community begins to find its voice in shared issues or concerns that cross over community boundaries.

The power of self-advocacy is the first foundation of change for any community.

By recording the voices of the people, the peoples' stories, their issues and concerns can be carried forward from the meeting into conversations on ratification and fairness in law. The voices of people carry a powerful message to policy makers that, sometimes, organizations cannot do.

### The Day of the Forum

Veniamin arranged a accessible large meeting room in the building where his NGO was housed. He ordered food and beverage and this Community Forum entitled, Your Voice Matters, was held on Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, starting at 4 PM and going until 6 PM. We wanted to provide a light supper as part of our gift to the community that attended this forum.

There were about 35 community members in attendance and we engaged in conversations regarding general life experiences for people with disabilities in Almaty as well as the Republic. We shared experiences from the US experience and I opened this part of the conversation by me sharing my life story as a person with a disability living in America.

Toward the end of our meeting we ask for anyone who was willing to share their story on digital recording and we recorded 3 peoples stories.

We then engaged in networking conversations, shared a traditional song, and took some group photos.

## **Community Forum Observations and outcomes:**

- We had a variety of people in attendance representing different disability communities, age ranges, gender, employment status and ethnicities.
- People shared information on a variety of topics and appeared to be less comfortable with an open structured meeting designed for cross discussion and safe and open input.
- We had 1 person who overpowered the conversation and took more group time than others.
- People shared in varying degrees of candor. A number of people shared their frustration with the lack of employment opportunities they had, lack of supports or removal of supports for basic government subsidies like housing or pension discrepancies. Some people shared their deep frustration and provided a more feeling based and emotional comments on their situations and aspirations.
- Upon hearing from a person who indicated they owned two businesses, and one was a disability Society, it became clear that developing or starting a disability related society was considered a business opportunity and in fact an employment focused endeavor as much as a philanthropic one.
- Some people were not clear on the format and were expecting a lecture from the American guests and may have confused the two forums.
- It was not clear to me if we reached an audience of people that were not already connected to the organized disability community and therefore unclear if the comments and information shared represented issues faced by the average person with a disability in Almaty.
- We spent some time discussing advocacy and the value of change being driven by the people” to assist leaders in understanding everyone’s issues and carrying a mutual message forward to government and others.
- We did focus on issues that had mutual interest across disability communities that included employment, housing, education and general public access.
- 3 people shared their life story on digital recording and these recordings were left with Veniamin for future use. We will stay in communication to assist in using these recordings, if the time or place presents itself.
- A personal observation was many people were using crutches and fewer used wheel chairs

**Goal 2** Provide a Leadership Forum for disability related NGOs, Societies, Government Officials, and the Special Commission tasked with implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

*Focus goal:* Discuss both challenges and successes in the American experience of implementing disability rights laws (the Americans with Disabilities Act, Fair Housing Act, Rehabilitation Act, and Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act).

*Targeted goal:* Generate discussion of best practices for developing laws and policies to implement the CRPD upon ratification.

Review:

*Rationale:* Kazakhstan is one of many countries to sign off on the UN Conventions for People with Disabilities (CRPD) and is awaiting its ratification. As the country currently wants to strengthen its laws and protection for people with disabilities as well as aligned them to the spirit of the Convention. The Convention was modeled after the ADA and we can learn from the experience of the US on challenges and successes on developing laws and making government laws and program implementation a pathway to better lives for people with disabilities.

We focused on three audience constituents;

- government, (Republic and local)
- Government appointed Commission to make recommendations for republic law changes to align the Republic with the CRPD
- leaders of the NGOs and Societies for people with disabilities.

We wanted to share experiences on issues of civil rights and laws that impact the lives of people with disabilities. From the American experience, we wanted to facilitate a conversation through questions developed to stimulate conversations that bring the Kazakhstan experience and culture into focus as recommendations for future changes were being formulated.

Day of the Event:

The Leadership Forum entitled; "Charting Your Own Coarse, Learning from the American Experience;" was held on Monday, October 7<sup>th</sup> from 9:30 to 1 PM.

Veniamin had reserved an official room with PA systems and refreshments for the attendees. A banner with the Seattle and Almaty logos and title of the forum was produced. Veniamin printed attendance certificates for all the invited guest to present at the end of the presentation and discussion.

We had about 40 people in attendance including:

Ali Amanbayev; Chairperson of Almaty city society of people with disabilities, Chairperson of Union of organizations of people with disabilities of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Adviser of Minister of labor and social protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Ali is also chair of the Commission for Recommendations for the UN Convention for People with Disabilities.

The rest of the attendees were leaders of various NGOs or Societies for/of people with disabilities.

20 government officials were invited from both the City of Almaty to republic Vice Ministers. None of the government officials attended. The American embassy guests attended, just long enough, to apologize for their absence because of the US government shut down.

Felecia and myself delivered a 90 minute presentation that tracked the American disability experience through a historical timeline that started with 1918 Rehab Act for returning war veterans through the current Department of Labor rules for implementing the 503 of the ADA that requires employers to develop affirmative action plans, track recruitment and hiring numbers for people with disabilities .

We presented the various laws in cultural context of other issues and movements that were occurring to underline the importance of cultural context and advocacy. The presentation focused on the following primary laws involving disability issues:

- Rehab Act of 1974, (attachment a)
- Housing Act, (attachment b)
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (attachment c)
- the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). (attachment d)

(overview handouts for these laws - [all translated into Russian for attendees])

Through the course of the presentation we indicated areas of American law that have been used to model articles in the UN Convention for People with Disabilities. We provided an abbreviated overview of the conventions.

(See attachment e)

The presentation presented elements of the laws in the cultural context and we provided PowerPoint pictures to illustrate various conditions or elements of our presentation. We also focused on the importance of early government involvement in disability programs and issues and the high value and need for the disability community advocates and organizers to push the movement forward through civil action and using methods learned from other civil rights movements including those utilized by Martin Luther King and the American Civil Rights movement of the 60's.

After the presentation, our discussions were focused on how the Kazakhstan Experience is progressing as the Republic moves toward ratification of the CRPD. We were interested in discussing the challenges faced by the disability communities (individually as well as collectively), to change law in Kazakhstan to align with the conventions. More importantly, we discussed what cultural challenges or barriers the communities might face as they move toward equality and a level playing field. We discussed the value of strong leadership that was aligned with strong disability community advocates. In addition:

We discussed the value and importance of positive government engagement and how strong partnerships and collaborations can support cultural change.

After our discussions, Veniamin called each attendee to the front of the room to receive their certificate of attendance and Felecia and I presented each with an enameled lapel pin of the Kazakhstan and American flags crossed over each other representing our friendship and partnership.

We then had photos and networking exchanges and the meeting ended at 1 PM.

## Leadership Forum Observations and Outcomes

- Our presentation was well balanced and provided not only a historical look at the disability movement in the US, but a tangible cultural exploration on how people, government and historical events shaped the disability movement in America.
- We presented ideas on what has worked well in America with the ADA and other disability related laws, and also presented what has not worked so well. Our focus was on the success of the public access portions of the ADA and the remaining challenges when we look at the employment impact on people with disabilities and how much further we need to go.
- We spent time discussing the importance of working together on “bridge” issues that bring various disability communities together and create strength of numbers and diversity through inclusion.
- We spent time discussing the importance of having strong government partners to develop sustainable programs that can provide measurable impact on disability communities.
- We were disappointed that none of the invited government officials were able to attend and felt this may represent the level of disengagement of the republic government in disability issues. We acknowledged that there was some engagement and from appearances, the involvement was heavy on commitment and light on follow through.
- Through discussions it became clear that often efforts and achievements of the disability community either impact a few or are not fully received or embraced by larger communities. There is some confusion on who leads who and how that leadership should impact or support real change.

**People expressed that they felt the meeting was helpful and wished more were in attendance to hear and express through discussion, strategies and frustrations as everyone works toward equity for people with disabilities.**

**Goal 3** Explore opportunities for public and private industry collaboration to develop potential funding sources for NGOs and other disability related associations.

*Focus goal:* Understand the economic impact and community involvement of American oil industry operating in Kazakhstan.

*Targeted goal:* Find opportunities for private industry to partner with government to assist in establishing reliable funding for disability services and programs.

### Review:

*Rationale:* Much of the disability focused programs for people with disabilities are underfunded and the needs of the average person with a disability go beyond recreation and basic subsistence.

The Leadership Summit is focused at solving funding issues for programs and services for people with disabilities. The government is a powerful partner in the changes around the disability culture and the culture at large. They however, cannot do it all and with all the funding demands might find corporate participation through community grants and other funding strategies. American companies have much incentive to participate in community based projects and the opportunity to enhance their image with the citizens of Kazakhstan, is a win for all.

If the project can begin the dialogue between the major stakeholders of private industry, government and NGOs representing people with disabilities, then this would be a success. If the representatives for each of the stakeholder groups can be identified, then this would be a success.

### Leadership Summit Observations and Outcomes

- We spent time researching the philanthropic participation by Chevron and Mobil/Exon throughout the world and specifically in Kazakhstan.
- We analyzed potential "win - win" opportunities for these American industries with a focus on their corporate strategies for community involvement.
- Through a connection I have with the Washington State Office of Financial Management, I made contact to the Vice Minister of Economic Development and Budget for the Republic of Kazakhstan. We corresponded through linked in and later through direct email. She indicated she was committed to our cause and intended to meet with our delegation during the Leadership Summit as well as attend the Leadership Forum .

The Vice Minister of Economic Development and Budget made contact to the Vice Minister of Labor and Protective Services and indicated she was also interested in meeting with us and attending the Leadership Forum.

We were requested to send formal letters of invitation to our meetings in Almaty indicating the dates, times and locations. The Republic's Union of People with Disabilities was also requested to send a formal letter of invitation , which Ali and Veniamin did.

- The Leadership Summit was scheduled to meet on Friday, October 4<sup>th</sup> with Ali and Veniamin as well as with representatives from the oil industry.
- Chevron was challenging to get through the various fire walls at their US Headquarters and about 1 week before our trip was to begin we made contact to a government relations professional responsible for international relations. She was attending a conference in New York City with the oil industries and was going to discuss our request to meet with their representatives in Kazakhstan. Chevron had offices in Almaty. She was optimistic that this could happen. We exchanged phone and contact information.
- Exxon/Mobil was very much interested in turning the conversation over to someone else and their representative in Kazakhstan kept wanting us to contact the Orphanage for Handicapped Children where they do disability community work. They were resistant to a meeting in Almaty and we offered a video conferencing option.
- #3 Days before our Leadership Summit, the Vice Ministers office contacted Veniamin to let them know they thought the meetings were in Astana and therefore would be unable to make the scheduled meetings.
- I placed a Skype call to Chevron a few days before the October 4<sup>th</sup> meeting with no response.
- My impression is that the disability communities in Kazakhstan, share in the same experience I described above; where they feel that the government is supporting the cause for equality, and at the last minute has a reason why they are unable to follow through with promises made.
- Chevron can still be a strong player in supporting disability related programs and I would suggest continuing to develop the relationship.

We were disappointed that the Leadership Summit did not occur and it was helpful to experience some of the challenges NGOs, Disability Societies and disability communities face when trying to engage government and private industry.

# Summary and Personal Observations

## Accomplishments and Challenges

- The City of Almaty has major challenges as it works toward providing equal public access as the city has many steps and stair cases, including steps in the middle of sidewalks, steps going to underground crossings to get to the other side of the street, many if not most of the buildings/businesses/services have steps going up into their space. There was an irony that we found curb cuts in many places, yet if I were a chair user, I would have so few places I could go.

Ali shared that the public access standards that were currently being used are from the Soviet standards in the 70's. We experienced a wheel chair ramp that had the same raised angle as the steps themselves. I tried to walk up the marbled surface, and couldn't walk up it. It would be hard to imagine a person using a chair, using this ramp.

- Leaders in the Disability communities have spent many years advancing the goals of equality and opportunity and have made strong relationships with each other. There is connection to government and access to these high level officials appear to be limited to a few.

For many in the organized societies, when they want or need change to occur and government needs to be involved, they go to Ali who is connected to a number of government bureaucracies. Ali has spent many years developing these strong connections and therefore provides a strong but limited access to many disability communities.

- People with disabilities have developed and established numerous NGOs and disability related Societies to serve specialized functions and missions. Many are formed to provide a sense of community and connection to other people with similar disabilities. Some are intended to provide recreational or activity support. Many provide resource referral and coaching to utilize various services provided by governments or other NGOs. Some are established to create employment opportunities for people with disabilities. All these organizations are highly engaged in developing support or change.

- Government has few programs that are specifically designed to enhance employment, housing, education or public access for people with disabilities.
- The Republic of Kazakhstan is 25 years past “liberation” and has many priorities to build a nation. The government is focused on re-tooling the economy, taking advantage of the rich natural resources to create an economic base while developing new and innovative industries for the Republic. Almaty is poised to be the financial center for Central Asia, a world class ski resort and industry is being developed minutes from the city, and insurance and other financial companies are making Almaty their regional headquarters. The Republic is fortunate and in fact is one of a few countries in the area that is operating with a government surplus. The government represents about 55% of the entire economy of Kazakhstan.

As the Republic reconstitutes some of the country's cultural traditions, and prepares to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and world partner; it has progressed and also consumed much of the governments focus over the last 25 years. Often the issues that face the disability communities might not rise to the level of priority as these country building priorities. If government understood the contributions that it's disabled citizens can bring to the priorities of government as well as the ability to actively participate in the economic development of the Republic; the government might consider how some of the surplus now enjoyed by the government might be invested well in supporting programs of employment, education, public access and housing for its citizens who happen to be disabled.

- All the NGOs and Societies are competing against each other for government grants, patron groups, international funds or other valuable resources.
- From my observations, it appears that the disability communities may be developing on a separate track from other parts of the culture and there may be a tendency to try to create a “separate but equal” society. For example, the para transit vans (about 10 in number) were operated and run through the Almaty city society of people with disabilities and not part of the Almaty bus transit system.

- The Blind Society we visited, was established and has its roots in the worldwide movement for blind people that started in the 1930's. From our conversations, they were established in 1934, had 6 to 8 blind schools throughout the Republic, had 7 to 9 work industries for the blind to provide employment and the ability to earn a wage, had its own building that housed a braille and tape library, rehab counseling, orientation and training skills, youth services and other support services for the blind community. It was also pointed out that the blind Society has a strong donor base of wealthy patrons.

In other words, the blind community had its own school system, industry and employer base, self-contained services, advocates and professionals working on behalf of the community and a private funding stream from wealthy patrons.

At times it appeared that this was the model that other societies were aspiring to.

- The societies representing various disabilities or disability groups create an environment of lots of silo'd "islands: of disability communities and not many bridges between them.

This makes it difficult to work together around issues that impact all disabled communities, for example, employment, housing, education and public access.

- The Women's Society of Disabilities was progressive in the sense that it was part of an international movement, (crossed borders), was an activist group (flash mobs on inaccessible train stations etc.), was developing a 5 year strategic plan, was reaching out to non-disabled groups, friends and other disability organizations to establish strong collaborative efforts to move equity forward. This is a good model for other Societies to consider as it creates a stronger base of constituencies for disability policy and cultural change.
- It seems at times that people are unclear on who will make the changes everyone wants. Almost like waiting for someone else in leadership to make the change happen.

- Societies are formed to develop supports for targeted disability groups and often. Do not work together for change.
- During our Leadership Forum, there was a discussion on accessible buses and a member of the audience shared one of her experiences. She wanted to use a bus that had a chair lift. The driver didn't know how to operate the chair lift. There was discussion on who was responsible for educating the drivers on how to use the lifts. As the conversation unfolded, the group learned that the city had about 200 buses with chair lifts. That there was not a high use of these lifts and a driver could go a year and not use it. The conversation added questions on who should educate the public on the buses so they will know they can use them.

My observation of this conversation was that the high level leaders had pressed and accomplished the addition of 200 busses with chair lifts. The disability community was not aware of the extent of buses that had chair lifts and so there was not community knowledge about bus access.

The society leaders were asking who should be responsible for educating the drivers and they felt the bus system should do this. They also felt it was the responsibility of the societies to educate the public.

The challenges are complex as the focus on transportation and accessible base are confused by the following:

- There are lots of people that could use wheel chairs that are using crutches
- The City of Almaty is not accessible so there are few places a chair user could go independently
- The bus system has provided funding for the lifts and should perhaps educate the public as well
- The societies should maintain pressure on the bus system to keep their drivers trained on the lifts
- The public needs to use the bus system so the "system" senses the need for access
- Can putting pressure on the bus system access also pressure environmental access to public spaces

- During our community forum and our visits with NGO's in different districts as well as the Societies we met with, employment was a topic with high aspirations and levels of frustration.
- It was shared with us that the government had indicated that employers were to hire about 4% of their workforce from the disability community. Everyone was clear that there were few if any employers that had met this goal. It was shared that employers tell government that there is no one with a disability applying for work and therefore they have no one to hire. Yet most of the work aged people we met were frustrated because they could not find employment and were living off a small government pension or other charity sources.
- At both the Community and Leadership forums, people expressed in very sincere terms their desire to go back to the United States with us, so , they could get a job. They were willing to leave their country, family and friends to find employment. I found this to be a strong statement about the people's sense of frustration on employment and self-sufficiency .
- When we discussed education, most felt they had an equal chance through the general education systems and were able to get a good education. We also discovered that many of the leaders of the communities were educated through private sources including private schools, home education and tutors. The blind community provides its own school system. We also heard that people could "buy" grades and degrees so often there was the impression of education without the essence of it.

## Closing Remarks

Kazakhstan has developed through its disability related NGO's and Societies the infrastructure to implement programs that will benefit all members of the disability community.

Societies and NGO's will create a stronger message of change if they work together around common cause.

Individuals developing a stronger sense of advocacy and targeted purpose can assist the disability movement and instruct community leaders on the needs of all the people.

To be successful, the government needs to engage in a stronger partnership with the NGO's and Societies to build realistic and measurable goals with a focus on the four basic areas we discussed during our visit; employment, public access, housing and education.

### Employment

- Employment represents a stronger path to independence and self-reliance. It creates economic power within communities and can create incentives for business and others to become more accessible and provide better accommodations. A loyal money spending consumer base brings strength of message.
- Employment also provides dignity and mobility.
- Provides public exposure to people with disabilities and assists in breaking down stereo-types and myths about people with disabilities.

### Public Access

- Communities have the right under the UN Convention to live an integrated life with the same access to public spaces as non-disabled people. Almaty and to varying degree the Republic of Kazakhstan will need a strong focus and substantial funding to start to develop accessible spaces. The government can lead by making their offices and facilities accessible. The governments also need to take the lead on public spaces like sidewalks and other open spaces. The leadership shown by government can assist other property owners through example.
- The cost and extent of creating an accessible environment is substantial.
- Government needs to commit funds and goals to making access a reality.
- Government cannot expect others to be accessible until they lead through example.

- Public access is the expression of independence and inclusion.
- Public access creates a sense of freedom and empowerment for all the possibilities that the disability communities can produce.

### Housing

- Affordable and accessible housing so people with disabilities can choose to live where they want within their means is a true expression of integration.
- Employment assist in creating demand and the ability to move more freely to areas of choice.
- Private housing and public need to review and determine how to make these spaces accessible.
- New buildings and developments need to consider disability related architectural standards to ensure access through design.

### Education

- High expectations in an integrated environment can provide people with disabilities the basic tools to compete with their non-disabled peers.
- From the American experience, education has become a great equalizer for people with disabilities and people with higher education have better employment success rates.
- Education should be focused on employment as part of the measurable outcome.
- School systems will need to understand access and accommodations to create a level playing field for students with disabilities.
- Communities need to request and indeed demand, equal access to the school systems with the expectation that they will receive an equal quality education. Separate can develop an education system, however, it can't be equal if you don't socialize to compete with others.

## Possible Recommendations - Opportunities

The people of Kazakhstan are on their own pathway to equity for people with disabilities. The NGO's and Societies are open and hungry for best practices as well as supports to move their programs and social goals forward. Funding from all sources is critical to mitigate public access and housing concerns. Employment is critical to establish independence and economic power to assist disability communities in full expression and engagement in full participation with non-disabled citizens. Equal quality and educational opportunity develops the tools for people with disabilities to compete with their non-disabled peers.

All these elements working together can provide the opportunity for people with disabilities to fully participate in all aspects of life and be contributing members of the Kazakhstan Republic.

### UN Convention for People with Disabilities (CRPD)

- When the CRPD is ratified and Republic laws are reviewed and changed to support the implementation of the Convention, the disability community and supporters need to be diligent to ensure that there is a strong enforcement element to support the changes in business and other cultural life that will be required to make the CRPD successful over time. Staying focused on this element creates the opportunity for real change to occur over time.
- The disability communities should work with government to insure that there is a strong enforcement "arm" in the government. Much like our EEOC or Civil Rights organizations where violation of the rights of people with disabilities have a strong partner in litigation or mitigation to resolve discrimination concerns or complaints. Only government can provide this enforcement infrastructure. This is governments opportunity to show through commitment to the CRPD and a serious commitment to the people in Kazakhstan that happen to be disabled.
- The Republic will need a legal system that supports and understands the spirit of the CRPD and upholds the rights of people with disabilities. An educated disability public is essential as is the support of Societies or NGO's that can file complaints on behalf of their communities. Again, as strong and engage public who owns the rights granted under the CRPD is the glue that makes the process work.

- The opportunity to engage a large cross section of people with disabilities in the concept of equal rights and human rights supported by law. The opportunity of educating the public on the rights for all people.
- The Republic will need people with disabilities who are willing and ready to stand up for their rights and fight to have the CRPD enforced and honored throughout society. This is the challenge of advocacy that may need people to stand up and be heard by government and others and the opportunity of personal commitment for every person with a disability and their non-disabled supporters.

### Government and private industry

- Societies and NGO's, working together, could identify officials in the Republic and city governments including members of parliament, that have been personally impacted by disabilities. Officials that have an immediate family members, close relatives or friends that have or are struggling with issues as a result of disability. The intention is to develop a network of "disability champions" in the halls of government that can support and advance the concerns of the disability community. This is a methodical and strategic network that can be called upon for legislative action, enforcement or government support for current and future efforts to create true equity for people with disabilities. These champions will have an emotional connection to issues of disabilities and therefore have a stronger engagement and alignment with the disability community. If all the Societies and NGOs work together, and develops a contact list with member profiles, considers strategic methods to utilize the internal government network; then these champions can become invaluable for the disability movement.
- Government will need to commit to a steady funding base to address the complicated and vast need for public space "retrofitting." Only government at all levels will be able to create these accessible public spaces. The opportunity for government is to reduce costs in the future by requiring access standards in all new or remodeling construction including sidewalks and roads. Any infrastructure projects should have a CRPD review to ensure access. There is also the opportunity for examples to assist people in understanding the "gold standard" for access as the

rest of the public arena tackles the massive task of retro-fitting buildings and public spaces.

- American industry can still be a strong partner in providing community funding for programs that focus on the empowerment of people with disabilities especially through employment and education programs. These programs match the philanthropic foot print of these American oil industries. The opportunity to be seen as a strong community partner and engaged in the future of the people of Kazakhstan is a win-win for the American industries.
  - Government can also lead through employment initiatives and should be a leader in the hiring and promotion of people with disabilities throughout all job categories. Government is seen as a leader in the disability movement and their real opportunity is creating a diverse workforce that reflects the people of Kazakhstan.
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## Future Project Ideas

- I am looking forward to continued work with Veniamin and the people of Kazakhstan to support their journey and provide any assistance or resources I am able. The value of working on collaborative projects or initiatives that draw from international experiences, best practices and models will assist the people of Kazakhstan to sustain future momentum for changing the lives of people with disabilities.
- One project under consideration, is the possibility of collecting 200 donated wheelchairs and walkers in the Seattle area . then, shipping them to Kazakhstan for distribution through the Union of People with Disabilities and other related NGO's and Societies. . One goal is to provide some physical relief to people who are currently using crutches (because they are free). If wheelchairs and walkers were also free, many would find these tools less destructive on them physically and probably the more appropriate accommodation.
- A secondary goal might be, to create a more intense realization through experiencing the lack of access in the public, private and open spaces around them. More people demanding access creates ...clearly ...more demand for something to be done. It is a "tail wagging the dog" approach and this developing demand will support a budding advocacy movement and lead to potential change.
- Another project under consideration is the development of a targeted and focused international advocacy organization or NGO focused on implementable projects using shared best practices and the maturation of the actively forming advocates and Professional Fellows and alumni of the Project Empower movement. An action and performance based organization to put policy into action; and action into change. The group called "International Action in Motion" (a working title) will draw on best practices, policies and programs from all disciplines, including; government, NGO's, other disability organizations and international policy making bodies. The focus is measurable results and highly collaborative impact projects.
- A hybrid niche organization to carry out the goals of many.