

Voices, Values, Visibility: Advancing Disability Equity Together

October 23, 2026

Session Title

Elevating Family Voices in Disability-Informed Care

Presenters

Dori Ortman - Family Faculty and Advocacy Training Director, LEND Pitt, University of Pittsburgh/UPMC Children's Hospital

Jackie White - The PEAL Center (Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership Center)

Session Overview

This one-hour session addresses advocacy as a shared responsibility across healthcare professionals, families, and self-advocates. Drawing on real-world experience in advocacy training, family engagement, and disability-informed systems change, presenters will explore why advocacy is a core professional competency — NOT just a skill for families — and what it looks like in practice when professionals actively create conditions for family and self-advocate voices.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Articulate why advocacy is a core professional competency in disability-informed, equity-centered behavioral health care and identify at least one concrete way to integrate it into their practice.
2. Identify barriers that families and self-advocates face when attempting to use their voice in healthcare settings and describe strategies professionals can use to create conditions for meaningful participation and partnership.

Topics to Be Covered

Dori Ortman - Advocacy as a Professional Responsibility

- Why healthcare professionals must see themselves as advocates, not just providers, and what shifts in care when they do
- Reframing family and self-advocate narrative as actionable clinical and systems-level data
- The professional's role in moving from passive listener to active ally

Jackie White — Empowering Families and Self-Advocates to Use Their Voice

- Advocacy skills and competencies that equip families and individuals to effectively communicate their needs, rights, and priorities
- How professionals can actively support and sustain family and self-advocate advocacy capacity

Interactive Group Activity

The session will include a structured virtual group activity in which participants engage in facilitated small-group discussion around key session themes, followed by whole-group report-out. This activity is designed to encourage reflection on current practice and generate concrete, participant-driven strategies for elevating family and self-advocate voice in behavioral health care settings.

Resources

Participants will receive information on the following training and educational resources related to advocacy and family engagement:

- LEND Pitt Advocacy Academy (LPAA) — An interdisciplinary LEND Pitt Medium-Term Traineeship focused on building advocacy competencies in professionals, students, families, and self-advocates
- PEAL Center Training Programs — Resources supporting families, youth, and professionals in navigating disability-related systems including education, healthcare, and community inclusion