

KAITY ELLIS ADVOCATES FOR HERSELF... AND OTHERS

For much of her 28 years, **Kaity Ellis** has had to fight for her rights as a person with a disability. Now, in addition to advocating for herself, she supports other state residents in similar situations. A full-time **advocate with Disability Rights New Mexico**, Kaity makes sure people with disabilities can earn an education, have voting rights, receive needed therapies and medical devices, and have equal access to services available to all New Mexicans. And she plans to continue the fight all the way to Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.



“Just because I have a disability, no one is going to dictate what I can and can’t do,” Ellis asserts. “It may take me 20 minutes to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, but I will do it!”

When the long-time Deming resident—who now lives in Albuquerque—was graduating high school, she was discouraged from attending college. Kaity defied the naysayers and not only earned a bachelor’s degree, but also a Master’s in Social Work from Western New Mexico University. “Ever since they told me I couldn’t dress myself as a five-year-old, if you tell me I can’t do it, I will,” says Ellis, who is both legally blind and has cerebral palsy. “My grandmother still tells me, ‘Don’t tell someone they can’t do something until they’re given a chance to try.’”

NMDVR helped her get that chance to try, she says. “I applaud (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor) Ms. **Linda Fisher**, who said, ‘Let’s see what we can do. We want you to be successful,’” Ellis recalls. Fisher told her what transition services were available, explained Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and asked what kinds of technology she thought she would need to succeed. “I learned what my rights were.”

The agency was able to help coordinate the proper doctors and testing so she could get necessary services from the Commission for the Blind. “A lot of people think the wheelchair is my most significant disability. But the blindness is.”

“When you finish high school with a disability, you need the employment skills that come naturally to other high school students,” Kaity says. **“It’s up to us, as program participants, to say, ‘This is what I want to do.’ The services will support that goal.”** NMDVR also facilitated her access to assistive technology to help her get through college and begin her career.

“What I really appreciate (about working with NMDVR) is that I was an individual,” she adds.



In college, Ellis was a student senator and chaired the student accessibility and safety committee. The WNMU vice president of student affairs noted her efforts and brought her on to work with the administration to ensure every part of the student experience is accessible for everyone.

That background of helping others while looking out for herself has given her a lofty future goal: to one day serve New Mexico in the United States Congress, first in the House of Representatives then the U.S. Senate. “I want people to see that just because you have a disability doesn’t mean you can’t be a prominent member of society.

At the end of the day, nobody can stop you from being you and doing what you want to do in life.”

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