



# **APRIL 2022 Annual Report**

## **2023 Current Board of Directors:**

President: Kimberly Tissot (she/her), SC  
Vice President: Kim Gibson (she/her), GA  
Treasurer: Sidna Madden (she/her), OK  
Secretary: Mellie Santora (she/her), AZ  
At Large Exec Officer: Don Dew (he/him), IA

## **Members At Large:**

Stancil Tootle (he/him), GA  
Davina Patterson (she/her), AL  
Harry “Hank” Bostic (he/him), MI  
Aerius Franklin (he/him), WA  
Scott Birkenbuel (he/him), MT  
Germán Parodi (he/él), PR  
Lidia Fonseca (she/her), TX  
Mels Felton (they/them), WA  
Misty Dion (she/her), PA  
Vacant

## **DEI Seat:**

Dr. Fransha’ Anderson (she/her), AR

## **SILC Rep:**

Shelly Simmons (she/her), GA

## **Youth Seats:**

Shaylin Sluzalis (she/her), PA  
Evan Shockley (he/him), CO

Scan or Click this QR Code to Learn More About our 2023 Board Members



## **APRIL Who We Are:**

The Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) is a national, grassroots, nonprofit membership organization consisting of over 260 members from centers for independent living, their satellites and branch offices, statewide independent living councils, other organizations and individuals concerned with the independent living issues of people with disabilities living in rural America.

## **Our Mission:**

The Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL), a national disability-led organization, advances the equity of people with disabilities in rural communities through advocacy, collaboration, shared experience, leadership development, education, and training.

## **Vision:**

To equip APRIL members to build inclusive communities where every person with a disability thrives.



To our outstanding members, partners, colleagues, donors, funders, and friends:

This last fiscal year has been full of transition for APRIL. Our board spent the better part of 2022 developing a new strategic plan which included revising our mission and vision; engaging with our members; supporting CILs and SILCs; and developing and implementing programs to elevate the independent living movement in rural America. APRIL is the only national disability-led organization that advances the equity of people with disabilities in rural communities through advocacy, collaboration, shared experience, leadership development, education, and training. With APRIL's focus on rural communities, we understand the barriers people with disabilities experience. Such barriers include lack of access to transportation, reliable internet, positive physical and mental health opportunities, healthcare, and options for financial independence, to name a few. While APRIL works to empower CILs and SILCs to help their communities overcome these barriers, we also understand the importance of elevating the only federally funded cross-disability movement required to be disability-led. People with disabilities throughout America are often afterthoughts. Our communities are filled with ableism, and leaders without disabilities often lead other disability organizations. That's what makes independent living unique. As a disability-led movement, we have the power to challenge stereotypes to build inclusive communities and equip people with disabilities to lead their own lives. This is the magic of IL!

The APRIL staff continues to prove they are dedicated to doing whatever it takes to support our community. The annual report demonstrates the significant impact APRIL is making throughout the country. What the annual report doesn't show is the passion and dedication of the APRIL team to supporting you all in serving your communities.

While 2023 has been packed so far, there will be more changes within APRIL. Dan Kessler, APRIL's Interim Executive Director, will be transitioning back to retirement. We appreciate his strong leadership as he supported staff in continuing to build this great organization while the board conducts a national Executive Director search. Dan stepped out of retirement and six months post-kidney transplant because of his deep commitment to the independent living movement. We sincerely thank him for his years of service! Early this summer, the APRIL Board of Directors will announce a new Executive Director who will lead the organization to the next level. Stay tuned!

Don't forget to mark your calendar for October 12-14 for the 2023 APRIL conference in Anaheim, CA! We will return IN PERSON with this year's theme, "The Magic of IL." Lastly, please consider joining APRIL as a member or renewing your membership to ensure equity among the disability community and that our movement becomes the leader within the disability space.

APRIL is only as strong as its members, and we need you!

With Disability Pride,

Kimberly Tissot  
APRIL Board President

**Staff:**

Daniel Kessler (he/him), Interim Executive Director, AL

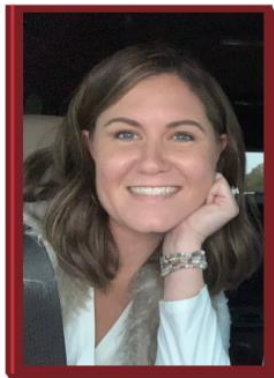
Elissa Ellis (she/her), Director of Operations, AR

Mary Willard (she/her), Director of Training and Technical Assistance, MT

Sierra Royster (she/her), Director of Innovation, NC

Abby Ritter (she/they), Youth Advisory Specialist, MA

Rachel Kaplan (she/her), Contract Communication Specialist, SC



## Board Retreat Synopsis

We had a retreat to write a new strategic plan for organizational growth and success 2022-2025.

### Nine Internal Outcomes came out of that retreat:

- Build a high functioning APRIL operational team & activate employee/staff development that maximizes competencies, expertise & efficiency.
- Elevate APRIL's nationwide brand awareness & recognition by telling a compelling story of our value & impact.
- Accelerate, focus & build the IL Culture though holding up our value, relevant advocacy & justice initiatives, youth initiatives, peer support & education.
- Improve & produce INTERNAL operational systems, processes & controls & reporting that maximizes decision making & positions for growth (back-office services).
- Ensure & continue superior front-running product innovation, listening constantly to the market need for thought leadership.
- Improve membership service value to attract and retain customers.
- Explore & build revenue diversity to grow and sustain the corporation-strengthen & build APRIL's financial position by navigating, engaging and positioning with partners & collaborators.
- Transform the APRIL organization to model Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility.
- Strengthen APRIL Board skills & acumen for superior GOVERNANCE function.

## Membership

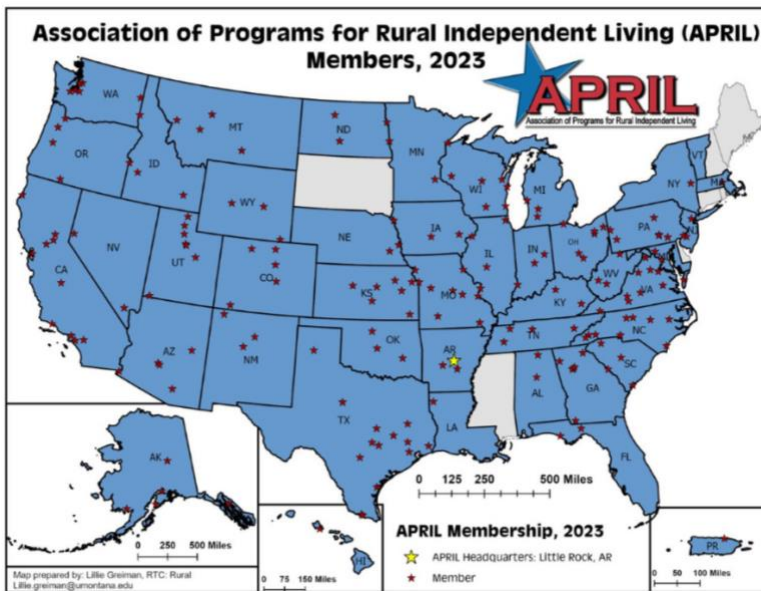
291 Total Members

221 Member CILS/SILCS/Others

70 satellites

16 of which were NEW in 2022

## Membership Map

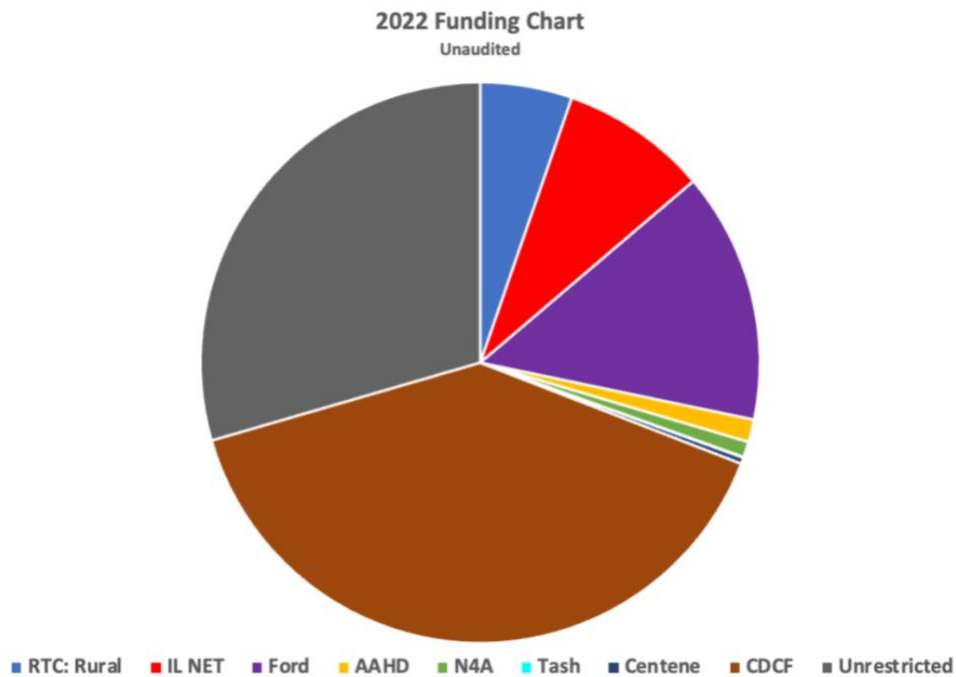


## Values Important to Membership





## Funding Sources



### Funding Amounts:

RTC: Rural = \$73,404

IL NET = \$117,219

Ford Foundation = \$200,000

AAHD = \$18,000

N4A = \$12,500

TASH = \$500

Centene Corporation = \$5,000

CDCF = \$548,080

Unrestricted = \$407,500 (Membership Dues, Conference Registrations, fee for service and fund balance)

### Conference Sponsors

Ford Foundation, Centene Corporation, Elevance Health, ADA Network, Christopher and Dana Reeves Foundation, Ability360, disABILITY LINK, Arizona SILC, and Idaho SILC

## About Our Programs: 2022 Annual National Conference

### Power of Peer Support

At this year's conference about half of the registrants who filled out evaluations attended for the first time. Workshop topics included diversity and inclusion, mental health, creative fund development opportunities, the ADA and addiction, competitive integrated employment, human resources for IL, emergency preparedness, rural outreach, SILC training sessions, building peer support programs and IL Skills training, and skills for consumers such as healthy cooking on a budget, connecting with your community, and healthy relationships.

- 381 Total Conference Attendee registrants
- 102 unique participants in the pre-conference Building a Movement: Peers and Volunteers
- 27 training workshops, 5 peer support sessions
- Keynote: Living in the Long Covid Era: Diagnosis to Disability and Everything in Between

### Every Body Every Mind Youth Conference

- 63 registrants with an average of 45 participants each session
- 115 participants in youth round tables
- 2022 Youth Steering Committee:
  - Chair: Sarah Goldman, FL
  - Vice Chair: Noah Russel, FL
  - Secretary: Opal Besaw, MT

### 2022 Conference Award Winners

- Earl Walden Award: Pat Chambers, Heartland Independent Living Center Owensville, MO
- Linda Gonzales Award Winner: Wednesday Jones, ABLE SC



## About Our Programs: Peer Support: IL-NET/ILRU

*“This has been invaluable - aside from great information, I've gained a wonderful new friend too” - 2022 mentee*

*“This has been such a rewarding experience for me. I love hearing about other CILs, their history, programs and how they operate. So much to learn from others expertise.” - 2022 mentor*

### Peer Mentoring

A one-to-one match for a six-month period for SILCS or CILS to expand IL programs or better learn their position in their organization. Six completed mentorings.

### Peer Mentoring Topics:

New SILC ED, New CIL ED, Nursing home transition, Finance director, Outreach and fund development, Four referrals to intensive support

### Rural Conversations Community

A conversational zoom meeting for staff at IL organizations to ask questions, share resources, and make peer connections. Topics included:

- Transportation
- COVID special funds
- Housing
- Nursing home transition
- Hybrid events
- Staff retention
- Program development
- Self-care
- Fund development
- DEI
- Vaccine support

Nine regular monthly meetings and five conference peer meetings: attendance rates 60-150

## **About Our Programs: Peer Support: Ford Foundation**

### **Youth Coordinator Connect**

A conversational zoom meeting for staff supporting youth programs at IL organizations to ask questions, share resources, and make peer connections. 12 completed calls attendance rates: 15-45

Topics included:

- Mental health services
- Substance abuse with youth
- Disability awareness
- DEI in youth programs
- Starting a program from scratch
- Self-care
- Recruitment
- Peer support
- Employment
- Voting rights
- Inclusive curriculum
- Navigating VR Barriers

### **Youth Peer Support**

Initial kickoff meetings a conversational group for young people with disabilities across the country to make peer connections and share struggles and supports

## **About Our Programs: Peer Support: CDC Foundation**

Supported eight CILs from three different states to get 66 people vaccinated or boosted and provided peer support and tools to each other throughout the process including surveying people with disabilities in their states about barriers to accessing vaccines in both English and Spanish.

## About our Programs: Training: Ford Foundation:

LEAD ON: a training and peer support program for young leaders with disabilities throughout the country looking to increase their advocacy and leadership skills

- 15 participants, 12 completed the program.

Topics included:

- Identifying and understanding ones personal and professional values
- ADA and the workplace
- Conflict resolution
- Making community change.

BUILD: Building up IL Directors

- 20 participants

20 completed phase 1: a five-week training on management and leadership including personal growth, understanding of others, environments of Success

16 entered phase 2: personal goal setting, training sessions and reflection sessions led by respected IL leaders to support those goals including grant writing and fund development, Project management and delegation, supervision and human resources, self-assessment and developing your skills

Advocacy Committee Training Guardianship: What are the Alternatives and What Role Does IL Play: 76 registrants

DEI Committee Training: Changing the Landscape of IL Building an Organization for everyone webinar: 56 registrants

## **About our Programs: Training: IL- NET**

Planning Accessible Hybrid Events

## **About our Programs: Training: HCBS/HSRI**

Scary or not Scary Understanding HCBS Settings Rule 165 registrants

## **About our Programs: Training: RTC: Rural**

Rural Community Living Development: assisted in developing a toolkit and mentoring program for conducting rural outreach that will live within APRIL's programs in the future

Peer Collective: co-wrote a curriculum for CILs to use to address social isolation and developed and conducted seven self-care workshops for IL professionals

Rural Living Well: co-developed a toolkit for rural CILs to deliver online IL Skills training

## About Our Programs: Special Projects and Strategic Collaborations

### Strategic Collaborations:

APRIL brings the rural disability voice to these collaborations along with sharing important information to our members about these important programs, organizations, and offering our expertise to their programs. Below are organizations that we regularly participate with, not including the many we lend voices to on a more short-term basis.

- AAHD (American Association of Health and Disability)
- American Red Cross
- CareSource
- CDC Foundation
- Centene Disability Advisory Council
- Coalition of Partners for Housing Mitigation, Repair and Rebuild
- DIAL (Disability Information Access Line)
- DisData
- DETAC/TASH (Disability Employment and Technical Assistance Center)
- Elevance Health Advisory Council
- EmpowHer Network
- HCBS/HSRI (Human Services Research Institute)
- Rural Action
- Rural Youth Catalyst
- Low Income Housing Coalition
- National Aging Disability Technical Collaboration
- NCIL Rehab Act Subcommittee
- Office of Independent Living Programs Monthly team
- Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies
- SILVER (Saving Institutionalized Lives Via Emergency Relocation)

### **About our Programs: Capacity Expansion**

With FORD Foundation funds, APRIL was able to hire a Youth Advisory Specialist to work on youth program expansion. APRIL staff moved to Microsoft 365, migrated all emails to a single server, and added Spanish translation to our regularly offered accommodations for all events. We also added an Emergency Preparedness Committee for membership to participate in.

Support from the FORD Foundation allowed us to hire a contract communications specialist to dedicate time expanding APRIL's public relations and marketing strategies. APRIL added a MailChimp listserv system with tags for multiple groups to professionalize our listserv communications and ensure timely communication through our channels, consistent social media presence on Facebook and started Instagram and a LinkTree for relaying information to our audiences more efficiently.

Several campaigns were pushed out to engage our audience such as:

- During the conference
- Black History month
- Disability Awareness month
- Consistent information about APRIL programs

### **Mailchimp ListServ**

- Started sending intentional weekly update emails every Wednesday on November 8, 2022
- Email open rates of approximately 40% since this shift

### **Social Media Analytics: Facebook**

Social media was analyzed from September - December 2022 to assess social media engagement and outreach prior to the conference, during the conference, and post conference. Values show that outreach increased significantly prior to and during our Annual Conference.

### **Social Media Analytics: Instagram**

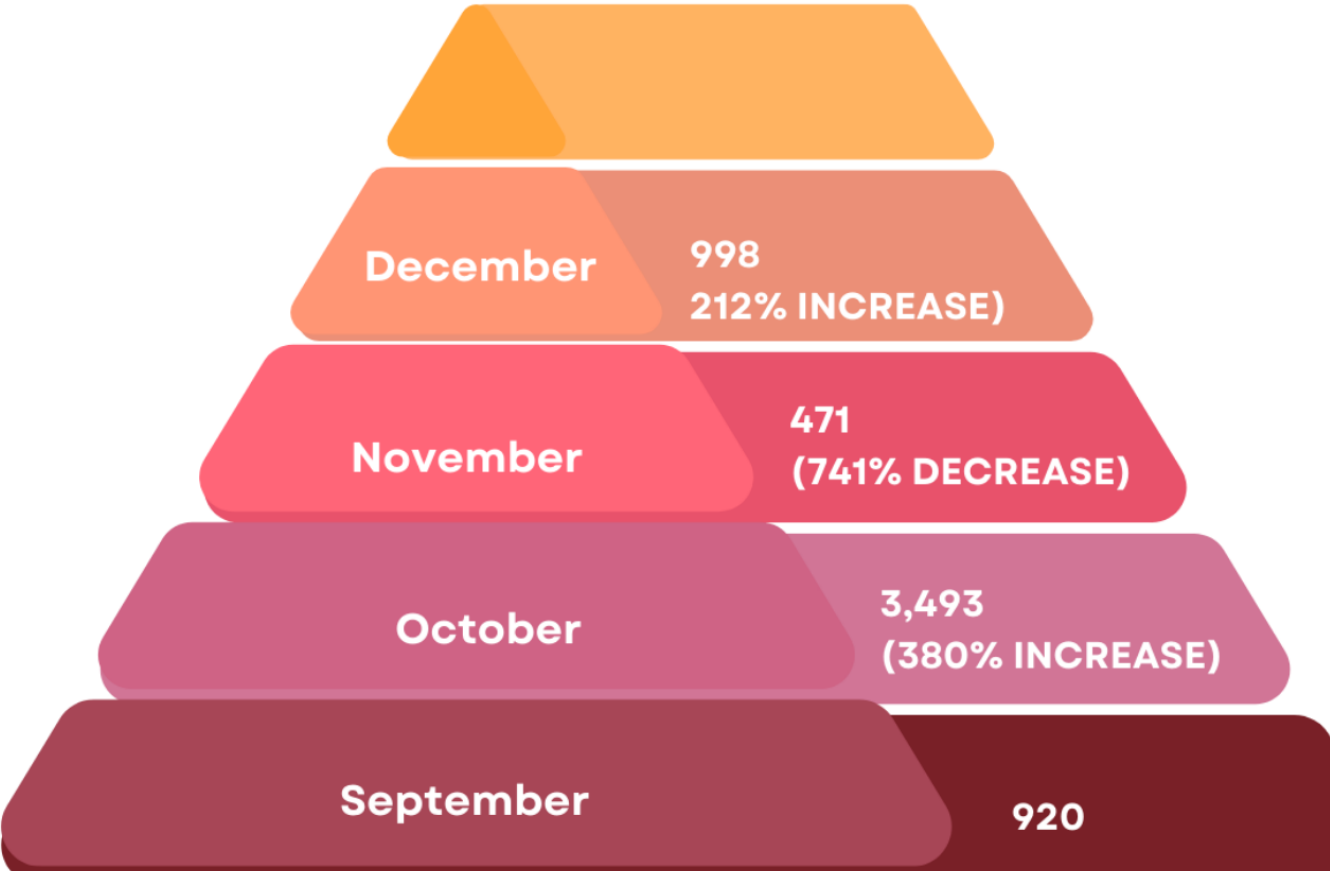
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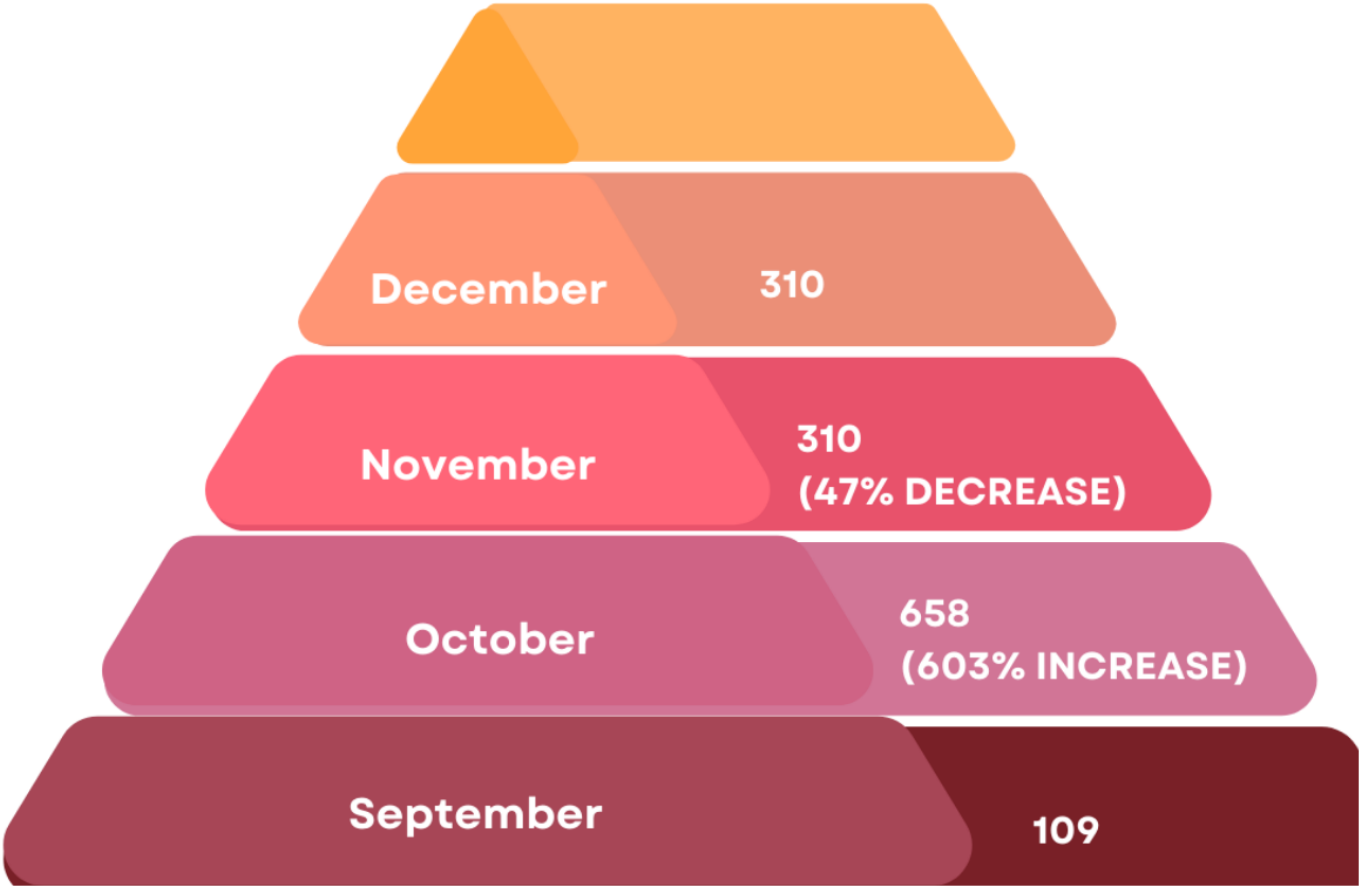
# Social Media

## FACEBOOK ACCOUNT REACH



# Social Media

## INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT REACH





Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)

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[this phone number now accepts text messages]

[www.april-rural.org](http://www.april-rural.org)

Click the icons below to see our APRIL social media pages

