

J.J. Profile

J.J. Rico is first and foremost a father who loves his family, with whom he lives in Tucson. Second, only to his family, he is the CEO of the Arizona Center for Disability Law (ACDL) and has been serving on the Council for eight years. J.J.'s favorite activities are camping or backpacking with his family and playing as much golf as possible. Some of his favorite places to camp or backpack are Fool Hollow State Park in Show Low and Saguaro National Park in Tucson. J.J.'s favorite golfer is Jordan Spieth, who has a sister with a developmental disability. Spieth also talks a lot and expresses his frustrations which a golfer like J.J. can relate to. J.J. enjoys golfing with his son, Diego, at least once a week. One of his best memories as a father is taking his older son to Philmont Scout Ranch, which has more than 214 square miles of rugged northern New Mexico wilderness, where you backpack for 12 days in the mountains of New Mexico, completely off the grid. Philmont Scout Ranch.

J.J.'s youngest son has cerebral palsy, a developmental disability, and more recently has developed epilepsy. He and his wife are a good caregiver team, and they call themselves Team Diego, along with all the therapists and doctors that have shaped his life. A lot of folks ask him the question, "Did you get into disability law because of your son?" But J.J. reminds them he just passed his 21st anniversary at ACDL, while his son is only 15. He says he became a lawyer because he always was a talker and wanted to impact people's lives positively. For example, he wanted to fight the discrimination that his Mexican grandparents endured. He thought law school was a good fit because it could give him a variety of options. He didn't necessarily have to be a lawyer – he could use his education in many different fields. However, because of his son, it has become a personal passion, as well as a professional one, to make the world more accessible and much more inclusive for those who have disabilities.

He says there are a lot of barriers out there for people with developmental disabilities. According to J.J., an area that needs particular attention is competitive integrated employment, or CIE. Competitive integrated employment is work that is performed at the same rate of pay as others doing the same job and within the community alongside others without disabilities. "A lot of the state systems still put people with disabilities in a box suggesting that they can only fit in working certain types of jobs, as opposed to really looking at their goals and their strengths and maximizing those," J.J. mentions.

J.J. was originally hired by ACDL as a result of the settlement of an employment case against Walmart that involved two young deaf individuals. His job was to monitor Walmart's compliance with the settlement agreement. J.J. was also involved in a case between Tucson Unified School District, and a custodian who believed he was discriminated against. The custodian was represented by ACDL, with J.J. as lead attorney, and the case ended in a successful jury trial. ACDL's client has since moved out of state and is doing well in a management position at a new school district – despite the fact TUSD made arguments that he was not qualified for the custodial position he held. In the *Goddard v. Harkins* lawsuit, J.J. advocated for appropriate accommodations to be made available for individuals with sensory disabilities to attend and enjoy movies at Harkins Theatres. The case went all the way to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, with that case ultimately reaching a settlement with Harkins that included captioning and audio descriptions at movie theaters statewide.

One of J.J.'s most memorable professional achievements was being an intern for Massachusetts Senator Edward (Ted) Kennedy during law school in 1999. Senator Kennedy was a civil rights champion whose legislation created change in many different areas because of his willingness to reach across the aisle,

working with other lawmakers regardless of party affiliation. J.J. has a picture of Sen. Kennedy in his office and his grandparents have the original. J.J. says, "It was an honor working for the Senator who played a significant role in the creation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and was such an icon to my family."

J.J. knows with Jon Meyers at the helm of the Council he will continue the work of his predecessor to make sure that ADDPC is one of the best DD councils in the country, and he will make sure that individuals with all disabilities, especially developmental disabilities, are included in government or state agency discussions.

Commented [MJ1]: Is this paragraph necessary? Could it be something more general? What we do isn't about one person - it's about everyone on the team.