

## Kelly Roberts profile

Dr. Kelly Roberts is the youngest of five siblings and jokes that she was born to be an educator. As a child growing up in Michigan, she had a friend in kindergarten who liked to eat snow. To convince him that this was a bad idea, she put some snow in a glass jar and let it melt to show him how dirty it was. and starting her journey as an educator at a very young age. Kelly is originally from Michigan, and has lived time in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Hawaii, and Arizona. In fact, Kelly was lucky enough to spend 21 years in Hawai'i, 2 of which were as a special education teacher, 2 working in the mental and emotional health field, and 17 as an instructor and researcher at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. (As a side note, her nephew is a past Teacher of the Year in Phoenix.)

Kelly is currently the Executive Director of the Institute for Human Development (IHD) at Northern Arizona University. She is also the principal investigator for the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC). This is a National program, which began in October 2015 with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration. Its purpose is to provide training, technical assistance, and continuing education to vocational rehabilitation professionals working with American Indians with disabilities, and it currently provides services to 92 tribes in 26 states. Kelly is also part of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), which focuses on supporting and promoting a national network of university-based interdisciplinary programs that includes IHD. Kelly was previously the chair of the Council on Research and Evaluation for AUCD. She has a master's degree in special education, with an emphasis on emotional impairments, from Kean University and a Ph.D. in education from the University of Hawai'i. Her passion lies in improving the quality of life of all individuals with disabilities and particularly those who are economically disadvantaged and who have limited access to services.

Kelly's favorite activities are snow skiing and water activities such as windsurfing. She has 12 nieces and nephews, as well as 12 great-nieces and nephews. One of her nieces was the winner of the first collegiate decathlon held in the United States and another was an All-American collegiate volleyball player. Kelly says if money was no object she would sail around the world.

Kelly believes one of the biggest barriers in the disability community is attitudes toward people with disabilities. Society needs to have higher expectations for individuals with disabilities. Kelly believes that one way we can do this is by using the media and arts to portray a more positive image of those who have a disability.

Another barrier Kelly mentions is that society tends to "put individuals with disabilities in boxes," limiting their life choices, which is not acceptable. This creates barriers that not only must be faced by those who have disabilities but also by those without. If people aren't aware that there are other options, they will be forced to stay in the boxes they know. Providing opportunities for people to be exposed to options so they can make informed choices is critical to impacting change. Unfortunately, people with developmental disabilities end up being put in a box more than people without disabilities.

Kelly Roberts is a person who embraces changes, likes challenges, and likes evolving concepts and activities that can help facilitate positive change in the world. In that vein, she says that working with the Council and with the Arizona DD Network is incredibly rewarding.