

Kristen Mackey

Kristen is originally from Julesburg Colorado, where her parents met when her father was in the United States Air Force and was stationed at Buckley Air Force Base (now called Buckley Space Force Base). When Kristen was a toddler, her parents recognized that she had difficulty hearing and took her to the doctor, where she was eventually diagnosed with a hearing disorder; her brother was diagnosed with the same disorder. Kristen also has Crohn's disease, which is an autoimmune disorder. The doctors suggested that she attend a special school for the blind and deaf, Since the school was so far away from where she lived, however, her parents elected to let her go to school close to their house. That family closeness proved enduring: Many years later, Kristen has a daughter of her own and two wonderful grandkids she loves to spend time with.

Kristen started out working in physical rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities across the lifespan, assisting children from birth to 3 years old, and ended up as a transition counselor for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). She eventually got her Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling at San Diego State University, allowing her to advance in her career up to her current position as Administrator of the Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

Kristen manages various programs at RSA. Typically overseeing a staff of around 500 individuals, she says a large part of her job is advocating for her staff's needs so they can effectively advocate for their clients. One of the most innovative programs she supports is the Arizona Business Enterprise Program (BEP). BEP provides VR clients who are visually impaired with opportunities to own and operate merchandising businesses. BEP was created in 1936 by the Randolph-Sheppard Act to provide entrepreneurial career pathways for job seekers with visual impairments. Kristen points out that, if you stop by the Sunset Point rest area on I-17 north of Black Canyon City and buy a snack or drink from the vending machines, you're probably supporting an individual from BEP.

A surprising and ironic fact about Kristen is that she is a former VR client who did not go through the system successfully. She became a client when she graduated from high school; she had little engagement with her VR counselor and eventually got a letter in the mail saying that her case was going to be closed because of her lack of communication and activity with the counselor. Kristen says this was okay with her because her VR counselor did not try to communicate with her, either. As her career path indicates, Kristen still believes in VR despite her own personal challenges with it. She says VR has so many valuable programs to help individuals find employment and to help the outside world adopt a competence-first mentality toward their clients.

Kristen is very outcomes-driven: She believes that you must know where you're going before you start on projects so that the goal can be achieved. This mindset can sometimes be hard to maintain, she says, especially when her husband (who is a J.R.R. Tolkien nerd) insists that you watch the "Lord of the Rings" series - extended version - and then discuss how the movies are different from the books. Honestly, though, Kristen loves to read so she admits the ask is not as horrible as it might sound to some.

One thing that Kristen likes about the Council is that it brings different stakeholders to the table and includes various representatives of state agencies and other individuals from across Arizona. The overall representation of people with disabilities in the Arizona community is something that Kristen says needs to improve. Also, she believes that the Department of Economic Security and other state agencies need to do a better job of leveraging resources like the Council. Kristen likes to encourage everybody to live

by the saying, "Attitude is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than what people do or say. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill," by one of her favorite evangelical leaders, Chuck Swindoll. She hopes that through her work as an Administrator, she helps pass that message on throughout all the programs she works with.