

Economic Justice & Disability

Dessa Cosma is executive director of Detroit Disability Power, a Ford grantee working to build the organizing power of the disability community. If you're working on economic justice but aren't including a focus on disability, she explains, you're leaving out the most marginalized people.

Transcript begins.

[Dessa Cosma, a white woman wearing a denim shirt and blue jeans, arrives for an interview in an airy industrial studio. She is a little person and is using a wheelchair.]

DESSA COSMA: For the last 15 years, I've worked in social justice. Working on economic justice and racial justice and women's rights, I started feeling lonely in those spaces. There was this wide array of communities being represented and issues being represented—but not disability.

[on-screen graphic: Economic Justice & Disability]

COSMA: My name is Dessa Cosma.

People with disabilities are some of the most impoverished people in the United States. We typically live below the poverty line, and because of lack of access to education and jobs, we will remain there unless we do something about it. And so to work on anti-poverty or economic justice without a focus, at least in some way, on disability means that you're leaving out the most marginalized people in that marginalized category.

If we are going to help people with disabilities get out of poverty, and if we're serious about ending poverty, we have to pay specific attention to people with disabilities and coming up with solutions particular to them. Because a lot of times solutions put towards a community without attention to disability further marginalizes people with disabilities in the process.

Everything that's wrong with our society was a set of choices, and the beautiful thing about that is that we can make different choices. So, there's this huge opportunity to rebuild our world in a way that actually works for people, and not just a few people.

[on-screen graphic: There Is No Justice without Disability]

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