

ADA Legacy Tour History of Self-Advocacy Exhibit

Panel One: Advocacy in the Nineteenth Century

The Self-Advocacy Movement can be seen as an extension of social and civil rights movements that were waged by historically marginalized groups of people. This movement is an expression of self-determination, opportunity to achieve, and participation in an accepting society that values contributions of people with disabilities.

The roots of the Self-Advocacy Movement in America began in an era where educators, physicians, social reformers, journalists and political figures advocated for what were considered at the time as better systems of care for people with disabilities.

One of the first institutions for individuals with disabilities was the almshouse. Living conditions for individuals with disabilities in the almshouses were sometimes deplorable. However, social reformers such as Dorothea Dix and Josephine Shaw Lowell began a movement to remove individuals with disabilities from the almshouses to institutions that provided more specific care.

Educational advocacy included the establishment of schools for children with disabilities. Early private schools provided instruction and care but were expensive and could not accommodate large numbers of students. In 1851, the "New York State Asylum for Idiots" was established in Syracuse and was the first government-funded institution in North America.

Educational institutions for individuals who were deaf and blind were also established. The New England Gallaudet Association of the Deaf was established in 1854 to address the needs of children that were hard of hearing. In 1880, the National Association for the Deaf was founded to advocate for reforms on behalf of people who were deaf.

Advocacy for individuals with mental illness included "first hand reports" by former inmates. Institutions for "the insane" were the subject of a number of media outlets that exposed abuses within institutions and called for reform of care and treatment.

Advocacy for the development of improved care and construction of institutions for people with disabilities took on a broader scope with the establishment of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1874.

Panel Two: Early Twentieth Century Organizing

The early twentieth century was witness to the continuing growth of advocacy for and by individuals with disabilities. Organizations for the integration into society of individuals considered deaf and blind as well as those with physical disabilities and those labeled "insane" or "mad" became increasingly active.

An achievement in advocacy for individuals who were hard of hearing was the founding of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf in 1901, which secured the right of deaf people to buy life insurance and obtain drivers' licenses.

Advocacy for reform of mental health care continued during this period. A pivotal moment was in 1908 with Clifford Beers' autobiography, *A Mind That Found Itself*, which exposed unfavorable conditions and treatment endured during his confinement in mental institutions. This led to the formation of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene.

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) was founded in 1921 to increase and enhance access to information for individuals with vision loss. Helen Keller worked for the AFB for over forty years as an advocate, writer, lecturer and fundraiser. In 1940, The National Foundation for the Blind was formed by Jacobus ten Broek to advocate for "white cane laws" for pedestrians, and for inclusion of people with visual impairments to become full citizens.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1918 initiated a program for injured World War I veterans and provided vocational training and job placement. Eventually, this law extended programs to those with other disabilities. Advocacy for the end of job discrimination continued with the 1940 formation of the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped. This group urged the establishment of National Employ the Handicapped Week, which was signed into law by President Truman in 1945.

In 1946, the grassroots of United Cerebral Palsy Association and The National Association for Retarded Children were formed. These Parent's Groups marked a new chapter in the advocacy for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In 1956, "Polio Living," a national magazine dedicated to serving all persons who have had poliomyelitis was published and in 1958, the "Toomeyville Gazette" began. Both magazines addressed the "polio nation" created by the epidemics of the 20th century and provided its readers disability related advice, information and advocacy.

Panel Three: Civil Rights and Independent Living

Between 1960 and 1980 the Self-Advocacy Movement became more focused. The 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* declared that "separate but equal schools" was violated the 14th amendment to the Constitution. This ruling fueled the Civil Rights movement, inspiring the disability rights movement. This period is marked by changes in legislation regarding funding of public education and the emergence of new philosophies of treatment, services and access to the community.

Edward V. Roberts, who had disabilities because of polio, enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley in 1962. Roberts had to fight for on-campus housing and organized a group known as the "Rolling Quads" to advocate for increased accessibility on and off campus. The activism that Roberts practiced led to the creation of the first student-led disability services program, the first Center for Independent Living (1972) and was the cornerstone of the Independent Living Movement.

In Sweden in the late 1960s, Dr. Bengt Nirje established a recreational club for people with developmental disabilities in which members chose activities to participate. Nirje coined the concept of "Normalization," which advocated for a more normal pattern of living and the end of the institutionalization. In 1973, the "First Convention for the Mentally Handicapped in North America" was held in Canada. In 1974, an American group of self-advocates launched "People First," the nation's largest and first self-advocacy organization.

Other disability rights organizations formed in this period including Disabled in Action (1970), Barrier Free Environments (1974) and the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (1975.) These groups lobbied, advocated and protested to achieve goals of social and legislative change, greater public accessibility and participation for people with disabilities in the community.

Legislative actions that helped shape the Self-Advocacy Movement during this period include The Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1975 and The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.

Panel Four: The ADA and Beyond

After 1980, The Self-Advocacy Movement continued to grow and build upon the successes of earlier eras. Gains were made in the areas of education, public policy, legislation and the right of individuals with disabilities to be more fully integrated in the community. Self-Determination, Independence, and Civil Rights issues were still the main focus. In 1981, The International Year of Disabled Persons was established by the United Nations to create awareness, understanding, and promote equality of opportunities and disability prevention.

Legislation advanced the rights of people with disabilities, enabling such individuals to file lawsuits for mistreatment (1980), have accessible polling places (1984), have increased protection from abuse and neglect (1986) and to have improved access and accommodation for air travel (1986). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 was considered a breakthrough for the civil rights of individuals with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 expanded the right to a free appropriate public education to children with disabilities.

Some of the organizations that emerged include the National Council on Independent Living (1982), National Black Deaf Advocates (1982), Americans Disabled for Accessible Public Transit (1983), also known as ADAPT. The activism of ADAPT played a major role in the Passage of the ADA. Also in 1983, The World Institute on Disability was founded by Ed Roberts, Judith Heumann and Joan Leon.

In 1986, former Willowbrook State School resident Bernard Carabello founded the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State. Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) was founded in 1991 by self advocates with intellectual disabilities. In 1995, the American Association of People with Disabilities was founded, which became the largest national nonprofit cross-disability organization.

The first Issue of *Disability Rag* was published in 1980. Mary Johnson is the creator of the "edgy" magazine that discusses disability rights and self-advocacy. In 1989, "Mouth Magazine: The Voice of Disability Rights" began publication. These magazines became a forum for cutting-edge commentary and reporting of issues and activities by members of the emerging "Crip Culture." Other disability-themed media emerged that focused on advocacy, lifestyle, parenting, education, rehabilitation and adaptive equipment information.

Courtesy of The Museum of disABILITY History - Buffalo, NY