

ADA Legacy Tour History of Self-Advocacy Exhibit - Panel Three of Four

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.

Courtesy of The Museum of disABILITY History - Buffalo, NY

