

## A Chronology of the Disability Rights Movement

**1817** The American School for the Deaf is founded in Hartford, Connecticut. This is the first school for disabled children in the Western Hemisphere.

**1832** The Perkins School for the Blind in Boston admits its first two students, the sisters Sophia and Abbey Carter.

**1841** Dorothea Dix begins her work on behalf of people with disabilities incarcerated in jails and poorhouses.

The American Annals of the Deaf begins publication at the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut.

**1848** The first residential institution for people with mental retardation is founded by Samuel Gridley Howe at the Perkins Institution in Boston. During the next century, hundreds of thousands of developmentally disabled children and adults will be institutionalized, many for their entire lives.

**1854** The New England Gallaudet Association of the Deaf is founded in Montpelier, Vermont.

**1860** Simon Pollak demonstrates the use of braille at the Missouri School for the Blind.

The Gaffaudet Guide and Deaf Mutes' Companion becomes the first publication in the United States aimed at a disabled readership.

**1861** Helen Adams Keller is born in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

**1862** The Veterans Reserve Corps is formed by the U.S. Army. After the war, many of its members join the Freedman's Bureau to work with recently emancipated slaves.

**1864** The enabling act giving the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and Blind the authority to confer college degrees is signed by President

Abraham Lincoln, making it the first college in the world expressly established for people with disabilities. A year later, the institution's blind students are transferred to the Maryland Institution at Baltimore, leaving the Columbia Institution with a student body made up entirely of deaf students. The institution would eventually be renamed Gallaudet College, and then Gallaudet University.

**1869** The first wheelchair patent is registered with the U.S. Patent Office.

**1878** Joel W. Smith presents his Modified Braille to the American Association of Instructors of the Blind. The association rejects his system, continuing to endorse instead New York Point, which blind readers complain is more difficult to read and write. What follows is a "War of the Dots" in which blind advocates for the most part prefer Modified Braille, while sighted teachers and administrators, who control funds for transcribing, prefer New York Point.

**1880** The International Congress of Educators of the Deaf, at a conference in Milan, Italy, calls for the suppression of sign languages and the firing of all deaf teachers at schools for the deaf. This triumph of oralism is seen by deaf advocates as a direct attack upon their culture.

The National Convention of Deaf Mutes meets in Cincinnati, Ohio, the nucleus of what will become the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). The first major issue taken on by the NAD is oralism and the suppression of American Sign Language.

**1883** Sir Francis Galton in England coins the term eugenics to describe his pseudo-science of "improving the stock" of humanity. The eugenics movement, taken up by Americans, leads to passage in the United States of laws to prevent people with disabilities from moving to this country, marrying, or having children. In many instances, it leads to the institutionalization and forced sterilization of disabled people, including children. Eugenics campaigns against people of color and immigrants lead to passage of "Jim Crow" laws in the South and legislation restricting immigration by southern and eastern Europeans, Asians, Africans, and Jews.

**1887** Anne Sullivan meets Helen Keller for the first time in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

**1890-1920** Progressive activists push for the creation of state Worker's Compensation programs. By 1913, some 21 states have established some form of Worker's Compensation; the figure rises to 43 by 1919.

**1901** The National Fraternal Society of the Deaf is founded by alumni at the Michigan School for the Deaf in Flint. It becomes the world's only fraternal life insurance company managed by deaf people. Through the first half of the century, it advocates for the rights of deaf people to purchase insurance and to obtain driver's licenses.

**1902** Helen Keller, the first deaf-blind person to matriculate at college, publishes her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, in a serial 1903 form in *Ladies' Home* journal in the latter part of 1902, as a book in 1903.

**1907** The first issue of the *Matilda Ziegler Magazine for the Blind* is published.

**1908** Clifford Beers publishes *A Mind That Found Itself*, an expose of conditions inside state and private mental institutions.

**1909** The New York Public School System adopts Modified, or American Braille for use in its classes for blind children, after public hearings in which blind advocates call for abandoning New York Point.

The National Committee for Mental Hygiene is founded by Clifford Beer in New York City.

The first folding wheelchairs are introduced for people with mobility disabilities.

**1911** Congress passes a joint resolution (P.R. 45) authorizing the appointment of a federal commission to investigate the subject of workers' compensation and the liability of employers for financial compensation to disabled workers.

**1912** Henry H. Goddard publishes *The Kadikak Family*, the best seller purporting to link disability with immorality and alleging that both are tied to genetics. It advances the agenda of the eugenics movements, which in

pamphlets such as *The Threat of the Feeble Minded* creates climate of hysteria allowing for massive human rights abuses of people with disabilities, including institutionalization and forced sterilization.

- 1918** The Smith-Sear Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation Act establishes a federal vocational rehabilitation for disabled soldiers.
- 1920** The Fess-Smith Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act is passed, creating a vocational rehabilitation program for disabled civilians.
- 1921** The American Foundation for the Blind is founded. Helen Keller becomes its principal fundraiser, (Robert Irwin becomes director of research, 1922 executive director in 1929.)
- 1927** Franklin Roosevelt co-founds the Warm Springs Foundation at Warm Springs, Georgia. The Warm Spring facility for polio survivors becomes a model rehabilitation and peer-counseling program.
- The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Buck v. Bell*, rules that the forced sterilization of people with disabilities is not a violation of their constitutional rights. The decision removes the last restraints for eugenists; advocating that people with disabilities be prohibited from having children. By the 1970s, some 60,000 disabled people are sterilized without consent.
- 1929** Seeing Eye establishes the first dog guide school for blind people in the United States.
- 1932** The Treaty of London standardizes American and English braille.
- Disabled American Veterans is chartered by Congress to represent disabled veterans in their dealings with the federal government.
- 1933** Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the first seriously physically disabled person ever to be elected as a head of government, is sworn into office as president of the United States. He continues his “splendid deception,” choosing to minimize his disability in response to the ableism of the electorate.

**1935** Congress passes and President Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act, establishing federal old-age benefits and grants to the states for assistance to blind individuals and disabled children. The act also extends the already existing vocational rehabilitation programs established by earlier legislation.

The League of the Physically Handicapped is formed in New York City to protest discrimination against people with disabilities by federal relief programs. The group organizes sit-ins, picket lines, and demonstrations, and it travels to Washington, D.C., to protest and meet with officials of the Roosevelt administration.

**1936** Passage of the Randolph Sheppard Act establishes a federal program for employing blind vendors at stands in the lobbies of federal office buildings.

**1937** Herbert A. Everest and Harry C. Jennings patent a design for a folding wheelchair with an X-frame that can be packed into a car trunk. They found Everest & Jennings (E & J), which eventually becomes the largest manufacturer of wheelchair in the United States.

**1938** Passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act leads to an enormous increase in the number of sheltered workshop program for blind workers. Although intended to provide training and job opportunities for blind and visually disabled workers, it often leads to exploitation of workers at sub-minimum wages in poor conditions.

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The National Federation of the Blind is formed in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, by Jacobus Broek and other blind advocates. It advocates for “white cane laws” and input by blind people into programs for blind clients, among other reforms.

The American Federation of the Physically Handicapped is founded by Paul Strachan as the nation’s first cross-disability, national political organization. It pushes for an end to job discrimination and lobbies for

passage of legislation calling for a National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week, among other initiatives.

- 1942** Henry Viscardi begins his work as an American Red Cross volunteer, training 1944 disabled soldiers to use their prosthetic limbs. His work at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., draws the attention of Howard Rusk and Eleanor Roosevelt, who protest when Viscardi's program is terminated by the Red Cross and the military.
- 1943** Congress passes the Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments, known as the LaFollette-Barden Act, adding physical rehabilitation to the goals of federally funded vocational rehabilitation programs and providing funding for certain health care services.
- 1944** Howard Rusk is assigned to the U.S. Army Air Force Convalescent Center in Pawling, New York, where he begins a rehabilitation program for disabled airmen. First dubbed "Rusks folly" by the medical establishment rehabilitation medicine becomes a new medical specialty.
- 1945** The Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) is formed in Avon, Connecticut.
- President Harry Truman signs Public Law 176, a joint congressional resolution calling for the creation of an annual National Employ the Handicapped Week.
- Boyce R. Williams is hired by the federal Office of Vocational Rehabilitation as Consultant for the Deaf, the Hard of Hearing, and the Speech Impaired. He begins close to four decades of work at OVR, designing and implementing educational and vocational programs for deaf Americans.
- 1946** Congress enacts the Hospital Survey and Construction Act, also known as the Hill-Burton Act, authorizing federal grants to the states for the construction of hospitals, public health centers, and health facilities for rehabilitation of people with disabilities.
- The Cerebral Palsy Society of New York City is established by parents of children with cerebral palsy. This is the first chapter of what will become the United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc.
- The National Mental Health Foundation is founded by conscientious

objectors who served as attendants at state mental institutions during World War II. It works to expose the abusive conditions at these facilities and becomes an early impetus in the push for deinstitutionalization.

**1947** Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) is founded at the Birmingham Hospital in Van Nuys, California, by Fred Smead, Randall Updykes, and other delegates from Veterans Administration hospitals across the country.

The first meeting of the Presidents Committee on National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week is held in Washington, D.C. Its publicity campaigns, coordinated by state and local committees, emphasize the competence of people with disabilities and use movie trailers, billboards, and radio and television ads to convince the public that its “good business to hire the handicapped.”

Harold Russell wins two Academy Awards for his role in *The Best Year of Our Lives*.

**1948** The National Paraplegia Foundation is founded by members of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, as the civilian arm of their growing movement. Foundation chapters in many cities and states take a leading role in advocating for disability rights.

The disabled students' program at the University of Illinois at Galesburg is officially established. Founded and directed by Timothy Nugent, the program moves to the campus at Urbana-Champaign, where it becomes a prototype for disabled student programs and then independent living centers across the country.

We Are Not Alone (WANA), a mental patients' self-help group, is organized at the Rockland State Hospital in New York City.

**1949** The first Annual Wheelchair Basketball Tournament is held in Galesburg, Illinois. Wheelchair basketball, and other sports, becomes an important part of disability lifestyle and culture over the next several decades.

Timothy Nugent founds the National Wheelchair Basketball Association.

The National Foundation for Cerebral Palsy is chartered by representatives of various groups of parents of children with cerebral palsy. Renamed the United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc., in 1950, it becomes, together with the Association for Retarded Children, a major

force in the parents' movement of the 1950s and thereafter.

- 1950** The Social Security Amendments of 1950 establish a federal-state program to aid the permanently and totally disabled (APTD). This is a limited prototype for later federal disability assistance programs such as Social Security Disability Insurance.

The Association for Retarded Children of the United States (later renamed the Association for Retarded Citizens and then The Arc) is founded in Minneapolis by representatives of various state association of parents of mentally retarded children.

Mary Switzer is appointed Director of the federal Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

- 1951** Howard Rusk opens the Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine at New York University Medical Center. Staff at the Institute, including people with disabilities, begins work on such innovations as electric typewriters, mouth sticks, and improved prosthetics, as adaptive aids for people with severe disabilities.

- 1952** The President's Committee on National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week becomes the Presidents' Committee on Employment of the Physically Handicapped, a permanent organization reporting to the President and Congress.

Henry Vicardi takes out a personal loan to found Abilities, Inc., a jobs training and placement program for people with disabilities.

- 1954** The U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, rules that separate schools for black and white children are inherently unequal and unconstitutional. This pivotal decision becomes a catalyst for the African-American civil rights movement, which in turn becomes a major inspiration to the disability rights movement.

Congress passes the Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments, authorizing federal grants to expand programs available to people with physical disabilities.

Mary Switzer, Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, uses this authority to fund more than 100 university based rehabilitation related

programs.

The Social Security Act of 1935 is amended by Pub. Law 83-761, which includes a “freeze” provision for workers who are forced by disability to leave the work force. This protects their benefits when they retire by not counting the years between the time they cease working and their retirement, thus freezing their retirement benefits at their pre-disability level.

**1955** Harold Wilke becomes the founder and first executive director of the Commission on Religion and Health within the United Church of Christ General Synod in New York. In this capacity he works to open religious life and the ministry to women and people with disabilities.

**1956** Congress passes the Social Security Amendments of 1956, which creates a Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program for disabled workers aged 50 to 64.

Accent on Living begins publication.

**1957** The first National Wheelchair Games in the United States are held at Adelphi College in Garden City, New York.

Little People of American is founded in Reno, Nevada, to advocate on behalf of dwarfs or little people. Gunnar Dybwad is named executive of the Association for Retarded Children.

**1958** Congress passes the Social Security Amendments of 1958, extending Social Security Disability Insurance benefits to the dependents of disabled workers.

Gini Laurie becomes editor of the Toomeyville Gazette at the Toomey Pavilion Polio Rehabilitation Center. Eventually renamed the Rehabilitation Gazette, this grassroots publication becomes an early voice for disability rights, independent living and cross-disability organizing, and it features articles by disabled writers on all aspects of the disability experience.

The American Federation of the Physically Handicapped is dissolved at a convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Participants organize the National Association of the Physically Handicapped, Inc. to take its place.

**1960** The first Paralympic Games, under the auspices of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) are held in Rome, Italy.

Congress passes the Social Security Amendments of 1960, eliminating the restriction that disabled workers receiving Social Security Disability Insurance benefits being aged 50 or older.

**1961** The American Council of the Blind is formally organized.

President Kennedy appoints a special President's Panel on Mental Retardation, to investigate the status of people with mental and develop programs and reforms for its improvement.

The American National Standard Institute, Inc. (ANSI) publishes American Standard Specifications for Making Buildings Accessible to, and Usable by, the Physically Handicapped. This landmark document becomes the basis for all subsequent architectural access codes.

**1962** The President's Committee on Employment of the Physically Handicapped is renamed the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, reflecting its increased interest in employment issues affecting people with cognitive disabilities and mental illness.

Edward V. Roberts becomes the first severely disabled student at the University of California at Berkeley.

**1963** President Kennedy, in an address to Congress, calls for a reduction, "over a number of years and by hundreds of thousands, (in the number) of persons confined" to residential institutions, and he asks that methods be found "to retain in and return to the community the mentally ill and mentally retarded, and there to restore and revitalize their lives through better health programs and strengthened educational and rehabilitation services." Though not labeled such at the time, this is a call for deinstitutionalization and increased community services.

Congress passes the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Health Centers Construction Act, authorizing federal grants for the construction of public and private nonprofit community mental health centers.

South Carolina passes the first statewide architectural access code.

John Hessler joins Ed Roberts at the University of California at Berkeley,

other disabled students follow. Together they form the Rolling Quads to advocate for greater access on campus and in the surrounding community.

**1964** The Civil Rights Act is passed, outlawing discrimination on the basis of race in public accommodations and employment, as well as in federally assisted programs. It will become a model for subsequent disability rights legislation.

Robert H. Weitbrecht invents the “acoustic coupler,” forerunner of the telephone modem, enabling teletypewriter messages to be sent via standard telephone lines. This invention makes possible the widespread use of teletypewriters for the deaf (TDD’s now called TTY’s), offering deaf and hard-of-hearing people access to the telephone system.

**1965** Medicare and Medicaid are established through passage of the Social Security Amendments of 1965. These programs provide federally subsidized health care to disabled and elderly Americans covered by the Social Security program. The amendments also change the definition of disability under the Social Security Disability Insurance program, from “of long continued and indefinite duration” to “expected to last for not less than 12 months.”

Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments of 1965 are passed, authorizing federal governments for the construction of rehabilitation centers, expanding existing vocational rehabilitation programs, and creating the National Commission on Architectural Barriers to Rehabilitation of the Handicapped.

William C. Stokoe, Carl Croneberg, and Dorothy Casterline publish *A Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles*, establishing the legitimacy of American Sign Language and beginning the move away from oralism.

The Autism Society of America is founded by parents of children with autism in response to the lack of services, discrimination against children with autism, and the prevailing view of medical “experts” that autism is a result of poor parenting, as opposed to neurological disability.

Congress establishes the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York.

**1966** Frederick C. Schreiber becomes the executive secretary of the National

Association of the Deaf.

President Johnson establishes the President's Committee on Mental Retardation.

Christmas in Purgatory by Burton Blatt and Fred Kaplan, is published, documenting the appalling conditions at state institutions for people with developmental disabilities.

**1967** The National Theatre of the Deaf is founded with a grant from the federal Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

**1968** The Architectural Barriers Act is passed, mandating that federally constructed buildings and facilities be accessible to people with physical disabilities. This act is generally considered to be the first ever-federal disability rights legislation.

**1969** Niels Erk Bank-Mikkelsen from Denmark and Bengt Nirje from Sweden introduce the concept of normalization to an American audience at a conference sponsored by the President's Committee on Mental Retardation, helping to provide the conceptual framework for deinstitutionalization. Their remarks, and those of others, are published in Changing Patterns in Services for the Mentally Retarded.

Silent News is founded by Julius and Harriet Wiggins as a newspaper for deaf people.

**1970** The Insane Liberation Front is organized in Portland, Oregon.

The Developmental Disabilities Services and Facilities Construction Amendments are passed. They contain the first legal definition of developmental disabilities and authorize grants for services and facilities for the rehabilitation of people with developmental disabilities and state "DD Councils."

Nursing home resident Max Starkloff founds Paraquad in St Louis.

Disabled in Action is founded in New York City by Judith Heumann, after her successful employment discrimination suit against the city's public school system. With chapters in several other cities, it organizes demonstrations and files litigation on behalf of disability rights.

The Physically Disabled Students Program (PDSP) is founded by Ed Roberts, John Hessler, Hale Zukas, and others at the University of California at Berkeley. With its provisions for community living, political advocacy, and personal assistance services, it becomes the nucleus for the first Center for Independent Living, founded two years later.

Congress passes the Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act, declaring it a “national policy that elderly and handicapped persons have the same right as other persons to utilize mass transportation facilities and services.” Passage of the act has little impact, however, as the law contains no provision for enforcement.

**1971** The Mental Patients’ Liberation Front is founded in Boston, and the Mental Patients’ Liberation Project is founded in New York City.

The National Center for Law and the Handicapped is founded at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, becoming the first legal advocacy center for people with disabilities in the United States.

The U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama hands down its first decision in *Wyatt v. Stickney*, ruling that people in residential state schools and institutions have a constitutional right “to receive such individual treatment as (would) give them a realistic opportunity to be cured or to improve his or her mental condition.” Disabled people can no longer simply be locked away in “custodial institutions” without treatment or education. This decision is a crucial victory in the struggle for deinstitutionalization.

The Caption Center is founded at WGBH Public Television in Boston, and it begins providing captioned programming for deaf viewers.

The Fair Labor Standard Act of 1938 is amended to bring people with disabilities other than blindness into the sheltered workshop system. This measure leads to the establishment, in coming years, of an enormous sheltered workshop system for people with cognitive and developmental disabilities.

**1972** The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, in *Mills v. Board of Education*, rules that the District of Columbia cannot exclude disabled children from the public schools. Similarly, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, in *PARC v. Pennsylvania*, strikes down various state laws used to exclude disabled children from the public schools. These decisions will be cited by advocates during the public hearings leading to passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children

Act of 1975. PARC in particular sparks numerous other right-to-education lawsuits and inspires advocates to look to the courts for the expansion of disability rights.

The Center for Independent Living (CIL) is founded in Berkeley, California. Generally recognized as the world's first independent living center, the CIL sparks the worldwide independent living movement.

Passage of the Social Security Amendments of 1972 creates the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. The law relieves families of the financial responsibility of caring for their adult disabled children. It consolidates existing federal programs for people who are disabled but not eligible for Social Security Disability Insurance.

The Houston Cooperative Living Residential Project is established in Houston, Texas, becoming a model, along with the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, for subsequent independent living programs.

The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law is founded in Washington, D.C, to provide legal representation and to advocate for the rights of people with mental illness.

The Legal Action Center, with offices in Washington, D.C., and New York City, is founded to advocate for the interests of people who are alcohol or drug dependent. Today, it also works on behalf of people with HIV/AIDS.

Paralyzed Veterans of America, the National Paraplegia Foundation, and Richard Hedding file suit to force the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority to incorporate access into their design for a new, multibillion-dollar subway system in Washington, D.C. Their eventual victory becomes a landmark in the struggle for accessible public mass transit.

Wolf Wolfensberger et al. publish *The Principle of Normalization in Human Services*, expanding the theory of normalization and bringing it to a wider American audience.

The Network Against Psychiatric Assault is organized in San Francisco. The parents of residents at the Willow Brook State School in Staten Island, New York file suit (*New York ARC v. Rockefeller*) to end the appalling conditions at that institution. A television broadcast from the facility outrages the general public, which sees the inhumane treatment endured by people with developmental disabilities. This press exposure, together with the lawsuit and other advocacy, eventually moves thousands of people from the institution into community-based living arrangements.

Demonstrations are held by disabled activists in Washington, D.C., to protest the veto of what will become the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 by President Richard M. Nixon. Among those organizing demonstrations in Washington and elsewhere are Disabled in Action, Paralyzed Veterans of America, the National Paraplegia Foundation, and other groups.

Madness Network News begins publication in San Francisco.

**1973** The first handicap parking stickers are introduced in Washington, D.C.

The first Conference on Human Rights and Psychiatric Oppression is held at the University of Detroit.

Passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act authorizes federal funds to provide for construction of curb cuts.

Passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 marks the greatest achievement of the disability rights movement. The act -- particularly Title V and, especially, Section 504 for the first time, confronts discrimination against people with disabilities. Section 504 prohibits programs receiving federal funds from discriminating against "otherwise qualified handicapped" individuals and sparks the formation of "504 workshops" and numerous grassroots organizations. Disability rights activism seizes on the act as a powerful tool and make the signing of regulations to implement Section 504 a top priority. Litigation arising out of Section 504 will generate such central disability rights concepts as "reasonable modification," "reasonable accommodation," and "undue burden," which will form the framework for subsequent federal law, especially the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board is established under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to enforce the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968.

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is organized to advocate for passage of what will become the Developmentally Disabled Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1975 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.

**1974** The first U.S. National Wheelchair Basketball Tournament is held, as well as the first National Wheelchair Marathon.

The Boston Center for Independent Living is founded.

Halderman v. Pennhurst is filed in Pennsylvania on behalf of the residents of the Pennhurst State School & Hospital. The case, highlighting the horrific conditions at state “schools” for people with mental retardation, becomes an important precedent in the battle for deinstitutionalization, establishing a right to community services for people with developmental disabilities.

The first convention of People First is held in Salem, Oregon. People First become the largest U.S. organization composed of and led by people with cognitive disabilities.

The first Client Assistant Project (CAPs) is established to act as advocates for clients of state vocational rehabilitation agencies.

North Carolina passes a statewide building code with stringent access requirement drafted by access advocate Ronald Mace. This code becomes a model for effective architectural access legislation on other states. Mace founds Barrier Free Environments to advocate for accessibility in buildings and products.

**1975** The first convention of American Association of the Deaf-Blind is held in Cleveland.

Congress enacts the Community Services Act, creating the Head Start program, with the stipulation that at least 10 percent of program openings are served for disabled children.

Congress passes the Developmentally Disabled Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, providing federal funds to programs serving people with developmental disabilities and outlining a series of rights for those who are institutionalized. The lack of an enforcement mechanism within the bill and subsequent court decisions, will, however, render this portion of the act virtually useless to disability rights advocates.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Pub. Law 94-142) is passed, establishing the right of children with disabilities to a public school education in an integrated environment. The act is a cornerstone of federal disability rights legislation. In the next two decades, millions of disabled children will be educated under its provisions, radically changing the lives of people in the disability community.

The American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities is founded. It becomes the preeminent national cross-disability rights organization of the 1970s, pulling together disability rights groups representing blind, deaf, physically disabled, and developmentally disabled people. It hires Frank

Bowe as its first executive director, begins a major study of the current status of Americans with disabilities.

The Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH) is founded by special education professionals responding to PARC v. Pennsylvania (1972) and subsequent right-to-education cases. The organization will eventually call for the end of aversive behavior modification and the closing of all residential institution for people with disabilities.

The Atlantis Community is founded in Denver as a group-housing program for severely disabled adults who, until that time, had been forced to live in nursing homes.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in O'Connor v. Donaldson, rules that people cannot be institutionalized against their will in a psychiatric hospital unless they are determined to be a threat to themselves or to others.

Mainstream: Magazine of the Able-Disabled beings publication in San Diego.

The first Parent and Training Information Centers are founded to help parents of disabled children to exercise their rights under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.

Edward Robertson becomes the Director of the California Department of Rehabilitation. He moves to establish nine independent living centers across that state, based on the model of the original Center for Independent Living in Berkeley. The success of these centers demonstrates that independent living can be replicated and eventually results in the founding of hundreds of independent living centers all over the world.

The Western Center on Law and the Handicapped is founded in Los Angeles.

**1976** Passage of an amendment to Higher Education Act of 1972 provides services to physically disabled students entering college.

The Transbus group, made up of Disabled in Action of Pennsylvania, the American Coalition of Cerebral Palsy Associations, and others, and represented by the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia, files suit (Disabled in Action of Pennsylvania, Inc. v. Coleman) to require that all buses purchased by public transit authorities receiving federal funds meet Transbus specifications, making them wheelchair accessible.

Disabled in Action pickets the United Cerebral Palsy telethon in New York City, calling telethons “demeaning and paternalistic shows which celebrate and encourage pity.”

The Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped is founded in Winnipeg, Canada, later becoming the Council in Canadians with Disabilities.

The Disability Rights Center is founded in Washington, D.C. Sponsored by Ralph Nader’s Center for the Study of Responsive Law, it specializes in consumer protection for people with disabilities, joining the Justice department in anti-trust action against the Everest & Jennings Company.

The Westside Center for Independents Living founded in Los Angeles as one of the first nine independent living centers established by Ed Roberts and the California Department of Rehabilitation.

**1977** President Jimmy Carter appoints Max Cleland to head the U.S Veterans Administration, making Cleland the first severely disabled (as well as the youngest) person to fill that position.

Disability rights activists in ten cities stage demonstrations and occupations of the offices of the federal department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) to force the Carter Administration to issue regulations implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The demonstrations galvanize the disability community nationwide, particularly the San Francisco action, which lasts nearly a month. On 28 April, HEW Secretary Joseph Califano signs the regulations.

The White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals brings together 3,000 disabled people to discuss federal policy toward people with disabilities. This first ever gathering of its kind results in numerous recommendations and acts as a catalyst for grassroots disability rights organizing.

Passage of the Legal Services Corporation Act Amendments adds financially needy people with disabilities to the list of those eligible for publicly funded legal services.

The U.S. Court of appeals for the Seventh Circuit, in *Lloyd V. Regional Transportation authority*, rules that individuals have a right to sue under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and that public transit authorities must provide accessible service. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, in *Snowden v. Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority*, undermines this decision by ruling that authorities need provide

access only to “handicapped persons other than those confined to wheelchairs.”

**1978** Fiesta Educativa, Inc., is founded in Los Angeles by Hispanic parents of children with disabilities.

Adaptive Environments Center is founded in Boston.

Disability rights activism in Denver stage a sit-in demonstration, blocking several Denver Regional Transit Authority buses, to protest the complete inaccessibility of that city’s mass transit system. The demonstration is organized by the Atlantis Community and is the first action in what will be a yearlong civil disobedience campaign to force the Denver Transit Authority to purchase wheelchair lift-equipped buses.

Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1978 establishes the first federal funding for independent living and creates the National Council of the Handicapped under the U.S. Department of Education.

On Our Own: Patient Controlled Alternatives to the Mental Health System is published. Written by Judi Chamberlin, it becomes a standard text of the psychiatric survivor movement.

The National Center for Law and the Deaf is founded in Washington, D.C.

Handicapping America, by Frank Bowe, is published. The book is a comprehensive review of the policies and attitudes denying equal citizenship to people with disabilities, and it becomes a standard text of the general disability rights movement.

**1979** The U.S Olympic Committee organizes its Handicapped in Sports Committee.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Southeastern Community College v. Davis*, rules that, under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, programs receiving federal funds must make “reasonable modifications” to enable the participation of otherwise qualified disabled individuals. This decision is the Court’s first ruling on Section 504, and it establishes reasonable modification as an important principle in disability rights law.

Marilyn Hamilton, Jim Okamoto, and Don Helman produce their “Quickie” lightweight-folding wheelchair revolutionizing manual wheelchair design.

The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) is founded in

Berkeley, California, becoming the nation's preeminent disability rights legal advocacy center and participating in much of the landmark litigation and lobbying of the 1980s and 1990s.

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill is founded in Madison, Wisconsin, by parents of persons with mental illness.

Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc., is founded in Bethesda, Maryland, by Howard "Rocky" Stone.

**1980** Congress passes the Social Security Amendments, with Section 1619 designed to address work disincentives within the Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs. Other provisions mandate a review of Social Security recipients, leading to the termination of benefits of hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities.

Congress passes the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act, authorizing the U.S. Justice Department to file civil suits on behalf of residents of institutions whose rights are being violated.

The first issue of the Disability Rag & Resource is published in Louisville, Kentucky.

Disabled Peoples' International is founded in Singapore, with the participation of advocates from Canada and the United States.

The Womyn's Braille Press is founded in Minneapolis to make women's and feminist literature available in braille and on tape.

**1981** The International Year of Disabled Persons begins with speeches before the United Nations General Assembly. During the year, governments are encouraged to sponsor programs bringing people with disabilities into the mainstream of their societies.

In an editorial in the New York Times, Evan Kemp Jr. attacks the Jerry Lewis National Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon, writing that "the very human desire for cures can never justify a television show that reinforces a stigma against disabled people."

Publication of *Images of Ourselves: Women with Disabilities Talking* by Jo Campling and *Ad Things Are Possible* by Yvonne Duffy highlights the concerns of women with disabilities.

**1981-1983** The newly elected Reagan Administration threatens to amend or revoke regulations implementing Section 504 1983 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Disability rights advocates, led by Patrisha Wright at the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) and Evan Kemp, Jr. at the Disability Rights Center, respond with an intensive lobbying effort and a grassroots campaign that generates more than 40,000 cards and letters. After three years, the Reagan Administration abandons its attempts to revoke or amend the regulations.

**1981-1984** The Reagan Administration terminates the Social Security benefits of hundreds of thousands of disabled recipients. Advocates charge that these terminations are an effort to reduce the federal budget and often do not reflect any improvement in the condition of those being terminated. A variety of groups, including the Alliance of Social Security Disability Recipients and the Ad Hoc Committee on Social Security Disability, spring up to fight these terminations. Several disabled people, in despair over the loss of their benefits, commit suicide.

National Black Deaf Advocates is founded.

The parents of "Baby Doe" in Bloomington, Indiana, are advised by their doctors to deny a surgical procedure to unblock their newborn's esophagus, because the baby has Down Syndrome. Although disability rights activists try to intervene, Baby Doe starves to death before legal action can be taken. The case prompts the Reagan Administration to issue regulations calling for the creation of "Baby Doe squads" to safeguard the civil rights of disabled newborns.

The Telecommunications for the Disabled Act mandates telephone access for deaf and hard-of-hearing people at important public places, such as hospitals and police stations, and that all coin-operated phones be hearing aid-compatible by January 1985. It also calls for state subsidies for production and distribution of TDDs (telecommunications devices for the deaf), more commonly referred to as TTYs.

The National Council on Independent Living is formed to advocate on behalf of independent living centers and the independent living movement.

**1983** The Disabled Children's Computer Group (DCCG) is founded in Berkeley, California.

Ed Roberts, Judy Heumann, and Joan Leon found the World Institute on

Disability in Oakland, California.

American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit (ADAPT) is organized at the Atlantis Community Headquarters in Denver, Colorado. For the next seven years ADAPT conducts a civil disobedience campaign against the American Public Transit Association (APTA) and various local public transit authorities to protest the lack of accessible public transportation.

The National Council on the Handicapped issues a call for Congress to “act forthwith to include persons with disabilities in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other civil and voting rights legislation and regulations.”

The United Nations expands the International Year of Disabled Persons into the International Decade of Disabled Persons, to last from 1983 to 1992.

Sharon Kowalski is disabled by a drunk driver near Onamia, Minnesota. Her parents, discovering that she is a lesbian, refuse to allow her to return home to her lover Karen Thompson, instead keeping her in a nursing home. Thompson’s eight-year struggle to free Kowalski becomes a focus of disability rights advocates and leads to links between the lesbian and disability rights communities.

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is founded by the President’s Committee on Employment of the Handicapped to provide information to businesses with disabled employees.

**1984** The Baby Jane Doe case, like the 1982 Bloomington Baby Doe case, involves an infant being denied needed medical care because of her disability. The case results in litigation argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Bowen v. American Hospital Association*, and in passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act Amendments of 1984.

George Murray becomes the first wheelchair athlete to be featured on the Wheaties cereal box.

The U.S. Supreme Court rules, in *Irving Independent School District v. Tatro*, that school districts are required under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 to provide intermittent catheterization, performed by the school nurse or a nurse’s aide, as a “related service” to a disabled student. School districts can no longer refuse to educate a disabled child because they might need such a service.

The National Council of the Handicapped becomes an independent

federal agency.

Congress passes the Social Security Disability Reform Act in response to the complaints of hundreds of thousands of people whose Social Security disability benefits have been terminated. The law requires that payment of benefits and health insurance coverage continue for terminated recipients until they have exhausted their appeals and that decisions by the Social Security Administration to terminate benefits are made only on the basis of “the weight of the evidence” in a particular recipient’s case.

The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act mandates that polling places be accessible or that ways be found to enable elderly and disabled people to exercise their right to vote. Advocates find that the act is difficult, if not impossible, to enforce.

**1985** Wry Crips, a radical disability theatre group, is founded in and, California.

The U.S. Supreme Court rules, in Burlington School Committee v. Department of Education, that schools must pay the expenses of disabled children enrolled in private programs during litigation under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, if the courts rule such placement is needed to provide the child with an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.

The U.S. Supreme Court rules, City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center, that localities cannot use zoning laws to prohibit group homes for people with developmental disabilities from opening in a residential area solely because its residents are disabled.

Gini Laurie founds the International Polio Network, based in St. Louis, Missouri, and begins advocating for recognition of post-polio syndrome.

The National Association of Psychiatric Survivors is founded.

**1986** The Air Carrier Access Act is passed, prohibiting airlines from refusing to serve people simply because they are disabled, and from charging them more for airfare than non-disabled travelers.

The National Council on the Handicapped issues Toward Independence, a report outlining the legal status of Americans with disabilities, documenting the existence of discriminating and citing the need for federal civil rights legislation (what will eventually be passed as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

Concrete Change, a grassroots organization advocating for accessible housing, is organized in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Employment Opportunities for Disabled Americans Act is passed, allowing recipients of Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance to retain benefits, particularly medical coverage, even after they obtain work. The act is intended to remove the disincentives that keep disabled people unemployed.

The Protection and Advocacy for Mentally Ill Individuals Act is passed, setting up protection and advocacy agencies for people who are in-patients or residents of mental health facilities.

The Society for Disability Studies is founded.

The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 define supported employment as a “legitimate rehabilitation outcome.”

**1987** The Alliance for Technology Access is founded in California by the Disabled Children’s Computer Group and the Apple Computer Office of Special Education.

Marlee Marlin wins an Oscar for her performance in Children of a Lesser God.

The AXIS Dance Troupe is founded in Oakland, California.

The DisAbled Women’s Network (DAWN) is founded in Winnipeg, Canada.

The US. Supreme Court, in School Board of Nassau County, Fla. v. Airline, outlines the rights of people with contagious disease under Title V of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It establishes that people with infectious diseases cannot be fired from their jobs “because of prejudiced attitude or ignorance of others.” This ruling is a landmark precedent for people with tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and other infectious diseases or disabilities, and for people, such as individuals with cancer or epilepsy, who are discriminated against because others fear they may be contagious.

The Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA) is founded in Chicago.

**1988** Students at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., organize a week long shutdown and occupation of their campus to demand selection of a

deaf president after the Gallaudet Board of Trustees appoints a non-deaf person as president of the university. On March 13, the Gallaudet administration announces that I. King Jordan will be the university's first deaf president.

Deaf Life begins monthly publication in Rochester, New York.

The Technology-Related Assistance Act for Individuals with Disabilities (the "Tech Act") is passed, authorizing federal funding to state projects designed to facilitate access to assistive technology.

The Fair Housing Amendments Act adds people with disabilities to those groups protected by federal fair housing legislation, and it establishes minimum standards of an adaptability for newly constructed multiple-dwelling housing.

The National Council on the Handicapped issues *On the Threshold of Independence* and a first deaf of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which is introduced into Congress by Rep. Tony Coelho and into the Senate by Sen. Lowell Weicker.

The Congressional Task Force on the Rights and Empowerment of Americans with Disabilities is created by Rep. Major R. Owens and co-chaired by Justine Dart Jr. and Elizabeth Boggs. The task force begins building grassroots; support for passage of the ADA.

Congress overturns President Ronald Reagan's veto of the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987. The act undoes the Supreme Court decision in *Grove City College v. Bell* and other decisions limiting the scope of federal civil rights law, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Honig v. Doe*, affirms the "stay put rule" established under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, under which school authorities cannot expel or suspend or otherwise move disabled children from the setting agreed upon the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) without a due process hearing.

The National Parent Network on Disabilities is established as an umbrella organization for the Parent Training and Information Centers.

**1989** The federal appeals court, in *ADAPT v. Skinner*, rules that federal regulations requiring that transit authorities spend only 3 percent of their budgets on access are arbitrary and discriminatory.

The original version of the American with Disabilities Act, introduced into

Congress the previous year, is redrafted and reintroduced. Disability organizations across the country advocate on its behalf with Patrisha Wright as “general” and Marilyn Golden, Liz Savage, Justin Dart Jr., and Elizabeth Boggs as principal coordinators of this effort.

The Center for Universal Design (originally the Center for Accessible Housing) is founded by Ronald Mace in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Mouth: The Voice of Disability Rights begins publication in Rochester, New York.

The President’s Committee on Employment of the Handicapped is renamed the President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

**1990** Altered States of the Arts is founded.

The Wheels of Justice campaign in Washington, D.C., organized by American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit (ADAPT), brings hundreds of disabled people to the nation’s capital in support of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADAPT) activists occupy the Capitol rotunda, and are arrested when they refuse to leave.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is signed by President George Bush on 26 July in a ceremony on the White House lawn witnessed by thousands of disability rights activists. The law is the most sweeping disability rights legislation in history, for the first time bringing full legal citizenship to Americans with disabilities. It mandates that local, state, and federal governments and programs be accessible, that businesses with more than 15 employees make “reasonable accommodations” for disabled workers, that public accommodations such as restaurants and stores make “reasonable modifications” to ensure access for disabled members of the public. The act also mandates access in public transportation, communication, and in other areas of public life.

The Autism National Committee is founded.

The Committee of Ten Thousand is founded to advocate for people with hemophilia, and their family members, who have been infected with HIV/AIDS through tainted blood products.

The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resource Emergency Act is passed to help localities cope with the burgeoning HIV/AIDS epidemic.

With passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, American Disabled

for Accessible Public Transit (ADAPT) changes its focus to advocating for personal assistance services and changes its name to American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act is amended and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities; Education Act (IDEA).

**1991** Jerry's Orphans stages its first annual picket of the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon.

**1993** The American Indian Disability Legislation Project is established to collect data on Native American disability rights laws and regulations.

Communication Unbound, by Douglas Biklen, is published, leading to a great increase in the use of Facilitated Communication. The method becomes controversial when it results in accusations of physical and sexual abuse by teachers, caretakers, and family members of people with communication disabilities.

The Glen Ridge case comes to trial in New Jersey, and three men are convicted of sexual assault and conspiracy, and a fourth of conspiracy, for raping a 17-year-old mentally disabled woman. The case highlights the widespread sexual abuse of people with developmental disabilities.

Robert Williams becomes commissioner of the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, the first developmentally disabled person to hold that post.

The final federal appeals court ruling in *Holland v. Sacramento City Unified School District* affirms the right of disabled children to attend public school classes with non-disabled children. The ruling is a major victory in the ongoing effort to ensure enforcement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

**1995** Justice for All is founded in Washington, D.C.

*When Broke His Head... and Other Tale of Wonder* premieres on PBS. The film is, for many, a first time introduction to the concept of disability rights and the disability rights movement.

The American Association of People with Disabilities is founded in Washington, D.C.

The U.S Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, in *Helen L. v. Snider*, rules that the continued publicly funded institutionalization of a disabled Pennsylvania woman in a nursing home, when not medically necessary, and where the state of Pennsylvania could offer her the option of home care, is a violation of her rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Disability rights advocates hail this ruling as a landmark decision regarding the rights of people in nursing homes to personal assistance services, allowing them to live at home.

Sandra Jensen, a member of People First, is denied a heart-lung transplant by the Stanford University School of Medicine because she has Down Syndrome. After pressure from disability rights activists, administrators there reverse their decision, and in January 1996, Jensen becomes the first person with Down Syndrome to receive a heart-lung transplant.

**1996** Congress passes legislation eliminating more than 150,000 disabled children from the Social Security rolls, as well as individuals who are alcohol or drug dependent.

Not Dead Yet is formed by disabled advocates to oppose Jack Kevorkian and the proponents of assisted suicide for people with disabilities. The Supreme Court agrees to hear several right-to-die cases, and disability rights advocates redouble their efforts to prevent a resurgence of "euthanasia" and "mercy killing" as practiced by the Nazis against disabled people during World War II. Of particular concern are calls for the "rationing" of health care to people with severe disabilities and the imposition of "Do Not Resuscitate" (DNR) orders for disabled people in hospitals, schools, and nursing homes.

Sen. Robert Dole becomes the first person with a visible disability since Franklin Roosevelt to run for president of the United States. Unlike Roosevelt, he publicly acknowledges the extent of his disability. He is defeated by incumbent Bill Clinton.

Georgia voters elect disabled candidate Max Cleland to the U.S. Senate.