

The RAP sheet – text version

TAKING A STAND – MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Welcome to the Spring Issue of the Rap Sheet celebrating the power of advocacy. Without effective advocates people with disabilities would not be entitled to a free and appropriate education, the Laconia State School would still be open, and the Americans with Disabilities Act would not be law. We hope you will be inspired by the stories of New Hampshire citizens who have made a difference.

SUSAN COVERT, EDITOR

Looking Back with Pride

The Disabilities Rights Movement and 35 Years of Advocacy
Clyde E. Terry, JD, CEO. Granite State Independent Living

In the day-to-day work of advocating for persons with disabilities it is easy to lose sight of the tremendous progress that the disability movement has made over the past three decades. Today, millions of Americans with disabilities have greater opportunities and more fulfilling lives because of the work and sacrifices of earlier activists. If all our citizens are to realize their full potential, we must remain steadfast in our commitment to fighting for equal opportunities.

In the late 1960's America was engaged in the struggle to make the 1964 Civil Rights Act a reality. While the Civil Rights movement was a fight to end racial discrimination, persons with disabilities shared a history of discrimination and added their voices to the call for civil rights. They too wanted a quality education, meaningful employment that paid a liveable wage, and opportunities to participate fully in the life of their community.

Though modest, the first gains achieved by the disabilities movement were significant as they set the stage for what was to come. Congressional passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 marked a shift in federal policy; it recognized that if given supports, persons with disabilities could go to work. The law also included a federal requirement for the elimination of physical barriers in any facility receiving federal funds. It was this legislation and the writing of the accompanying regulations (something that wasn't completed until 1979) that ultimately led to the formation of the independent living movement. Increasingly, persons with disabilities were organizing to fight for positive changes.

Effective advocacy by parents and individual with disabilities continued to result in major legislative milestones. In the mid 70's Congress passed the Developmental Disabilities "Bill of Rights Act" which stated the principles of choice and self-determination for persons with intellectual disabilities. 1973 saw passage of the first version of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guaranteeing students with