

# National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth

## DISABILITY HISTORY TIMELINE: Resource and Discussion Guide



Yoshiko Dart

This disability history timeline is designed to help you learn about the rich history of people with disabilities. If you have a disability, this is about your history, but it may not be the history you know. Increasing your knowledge of disability history will help you inspire and lead others by telling the diverse stories of the many who have gone before. Starting shortly after the United States was founded, the disabilities timeline features examples of the remarkable diversity, creativity, and leadership that has shaped the disability community up through today.



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**Note:** Although designed for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities, the Disability History Timeline and related activities can be used to educate a broader audience. For example, the materials may be useful for training service providers on the importance of educating youth with disabilities about their history or as an orientation for program staff before working with youth with disabilities.

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**NAME:**



1770

1776

### Founding Father Serves Despite Disability

Stephen Hopkins, a man with cerebral palsy, is one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Hopkins is known for saying "my hands may tremble, my heart does not."



Wikipedia

1780

1782

### Improved Amputation Techniques

Edward Alanson, an English surgeon, suggests a change in the way limbs are amputated, resulting in faster healing and less infection. This change has a positive impact on the quality of life for people who are amputees.



National Library of Medicine

Illustration (c.1700s) depicting surgical amputation of an arm.

1784

### Institution for Blind Children

After seeing a group of blind men being cruelly exhibited in a Paris sideshow, Valentin Huay, known as the "father and apostle of the blind," establishes the Institution for Blind Children to help make life for the blind more "tolerable." Huay also discovered that sightless persons could read texts printed with raised letters.



National Library of Medicine

Etching (1622) by Jacques Callot (1592–1635).

1790

1793

### Mentally Ill Unchained

Phillipe Pinel, a physician at La Bicetre, an asylum in Paris, removes the chains attached to people with mental illnesses. Some have been chained to walls for more than 30 years.



National Library of Medicine

Detail from Pinel Fait Enlever Les Fers Aux Aliénés De Bicêtre. Painting by Jean-Baptiste Pussin (1745–1811).

1798

### First Military Disability Law

Detail from painting shows U.S. President John Adams signing the act for the relief of sick and disabled seamen, July 16, 1798.



National Library of Medicine

1800

1800

### First Medical Classification of Mental Disorders

Phillipe Pinel writes *Treatise on Insanity* in which he develops a four-part medical classification for the major mental illnesses: melancholy, dementia, mania without delirium, and mania with delirium.



Wikipedia

1801

### Education for Mentally Disabled

Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard establishes the principles and methods used today in the education of the mentally disabled through his controversial work with Victor, the "wild boy of Aveyron."



Wikipedia

Detail from poster for François Truffaut's 1970 film *l'Enfant Sauvage* (The Wild Child), which dramatized Victor's life.

1805

### Mental Disorders Documented

Dr. Benjamin Rush, considered the father of American psychiatry, publishes *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, the first modern attempt to explain mental disorders.



Wikipedia

1809

### Birth of Louis Braille

Louis Braille is born on January 4, at Coupvray, near Paris. At three years of age, an accident caused him to become blind, and in 1819 he was sent to the Paris Blind School, which was originated by Valentin Huay.



Wikipedia



National Library of Medicine

Detail from wood engraving entitled, "A Blind Girl Teaching her Blind Brother how to Read."

1810

1815

**Formal Deaf Education Begins in the U.S.**

Thomas H. Gallaudet leaves the United States for Europe in 1815 to learn how to teach the deaf. Upon his return, he founds the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons in Hartford, Connecticut, with Laurent Clerc. It is the first permanent school for the deaf in America. The opening of its doors, on April 15, 1817, marks the beginning of efforts in America to educate people with disabilities.



Gallaudet University

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (1787–1851)

1817

1818

**McLean Asylum for the Insane**

The first patient is admitted to the Charlestown branch of the Massachusetts General Hospital, which is later named the McLean Asylum for the Insane. The hospital will become one of the best-known mental health facilities in the country, with services attracting such artists as Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, James Taylor, and Susanna Kaysen (author of *Girl, Interrupted*).



National Library of Medicine

McLean Asylum for the Insane, Somerville, MA. Engraving by H. Billings from a sketch by Seager (c. 1820s).

1820

1829

**Braille Invents the Raised Point Alphabet**

Louis Braille invents the raised point alphabet that makes him a household name today. His method doesn't become well-known in the United States until more than 30 years after it is first taught at the St. Louis School for the Blind in 1860.



Braille alphabet

1840

1849

**First "Sheltered Workshop" for the Blind**

The first "sheltered workshop" is developed for the blind at the Perkins Institution in Massachusetts.

1844

**Founding of Precursor to the American Psychiatric Association**

The Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane, the precursor to the American Psychiatric Association, is founded.



National Library of Medicine

*Composite photograph of members of the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane.*

1850

1855

**First Facility for the Criminally Insane**

The New York State Lunatic Asylum for Insane Convicts in Auburn is the first such facility designed specifically to house convicted criminals deemed to be insane. Previously, they were kept in prisons or hospitals.

1860

1860

**First Steps in Identifying Cerebral Palsy**

In the 1860s, William Little makes the first step toward identifying cerebral palsy (CP) by describing children with stiff and/or spastic muscles in their arms and legs. That particular condition, known at the time as Little's disease (now called *spastic diplegia*), is one of the major disorders included in CP. Little also correctly guesses that the condition is caused by lack of oxygen during birth.



Library of Congress

1861



1865

**1861–1865 American Civil War**

The American Civil War results in 30,000 amputations in the Union Army alone. This event brings disability issues to the American consciousness.



Library of Congress

*Detail of photograph from the Civil War.*

1862

### Birth of "The Elephant Man"

Joseph Carey Merrick, better known in later years as "The Elephant Man," is born in Leicester, England. Merrick's head and body become covered in large tumors as a result of a rare nervous-system disorder, which is now known as *neurofibromatosis* and was diagnosed years after his death. He earns money by appearing in sideshows throughout England and is experimented on and tested on by a lot of doctors and scientists.



Wikipedia

*Photograph of Joseph Carey Merrick, also known as the Elephant Man.*

1870

1872

### Bell Invents Telephone Trying To Help the Deaf

Alexander Graham Bell opens a speech school for deaf teachers in Boston. He invents the telephone while trying to develop a mechanical way to make speech visible. Bell reportedly believed that "deaf children should be educated orally and in day-school situations."



Library of Congress

*Photograph of Bell and his invention, the telephone.*

1880

1881

### Medical Degree For Freud

After researching the central nervous system, at Vienna University, Sigmund Freud, age 24, qualifies as a doctor of medicine. The following year, he begins work at Meynert's Psychiatric Clinic and begins to formulate the ideas that will comprise his theories of psychoanalysis.



Library of Congress

*Freud, engagement photo, 1886.*



Library of Congress

*Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan. Photograph by Notman, 1897.*

1887

### Helen Keller Meets New Tutor

Helen Keller, a deaf-blind seven-year-old living in Tuscumbia, Alabama, meets her new tutor, Annie Sullivan.

1900

1907

### Eugenic Sterilization Law Spreads Like Wildfire

Indiana becomes the first state to enact a eugenic sterilization law—for “confirmed idiots, imbeciles and rapists”—in state institutions. The law spreads like wildfire and is enacted in 24 other states.

1910

1917

### The Great War’s Disabled Veterans

After being caught in an explosion and diagnosed with shell-shock as a result of combat in the British Army in World War I, Wilfred Owen, 24, arrives at Craiglockhart Hospital near Edinburgh, Scotland. There he meets the poet and soldier Siegfried Sassoon, who later introduces him to Robert Graves. Literary works from these three men, often touching on the subject of men disabled in battle, form the literary historical record for all the countries involved in “The Great War.”



Library of Congress

*Detail from photo showing medics loading wounded into American ambulances on the French front.*

1918

### Funding for Rehabilitation

As a result of the large number of WWI veterans returning with disabilities, Congress passes the first major rehabilitation program for soldiers. In 1920, a bill funding *vocational rehabilitation* guarantees federal money for job counseling and vocational training for disabled in the general public.



Library of Congress

*Detail from photo showing recovering soldiers posing in a park at an American base hospital in France.*

1919

### Easter Seals, Model Charitable Organization

Edgar Allen, a businessman in Elyria, Ohio, founds the Ohio Society for Crippled Children, which becomes the national Easter Seals organization. It serves as a model for many of today’s charitable organizations—in its methods and, some activists say, in its exclusion of people from the community being helped.



Wikipedia

*Examples of Easter Seals stamps from the 1930s.*



1925

**Frida Kahlo (1907–1954)**

Frida Kahlo, 18, is injured in a bus accident in her hometown of Mexico City. Her spinal column, along with her collarbone, ribs, and pelvis, is broken. For a month, she remains in bed. Bored, she begins to paint, the first step toward becoming one of the most influential artists of the 20th century.



U.S. Postal Service

*Postage stamp (released for 2001) based on Kahlo self portrait.*



Library of Congress

Diego Rivera and Frida [Kahlo] Rivera. *Photographic portrait by Carl Van Vechten (1880–1964), March 19, 1932.*

**Study of Dyslexia**

Samuel Orton begins his extensive study of dyslexia, hypothesizing that it could be neurological versus visual, and that it was likely connected to left-handedness. His first assumption is right. His second one, not so.

1927

**Compulsory Sterilization Ruled Constitutional**

The Supreme Court rules in *Buck v. Bell* that the compulsory sterilization of mental defectives such as Carrie S. Buck, a young Virginia woman, is constitutional under “careful” state safeguards. Perhaps unbelievably, this ruling has never been overturned. In his opinion, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes writes:

“(It) is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind... Three generations of imbeciles are enough.”



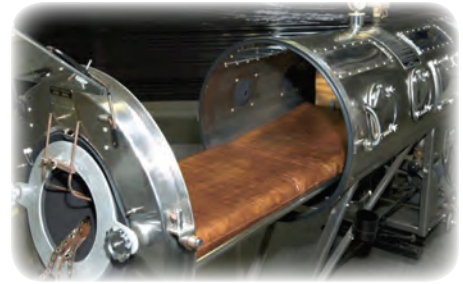
Library of Congress

*Oliver Wendell Holmes*

1930

### **Iron Lung To Combat Polio**

In 1927 Philip Drinker and Louis Shaw develop the iron lung, a chamber that provides artificial respiration for polio patients being treated for respiratory muscle paralysis.



Centers for Disease Control

*Iron lung donated to the CDC by the family of a polio patient who used the device from the late 1950s until his death in 2003.*

1932

### **Franklin D. Roosevelt Elected President**

Franklin D. Roosevelt becomes the 32nd president of the United States and is re-elected for an unprecedented four terms before dying in office in April 1945. In August 1921, while vacationing at Campobello Island, New Brunswick, Roosevelt contracted an illness, believed to be polio, which resulted in total and permanent paralysis from the waist down. After becoming President, he helps found the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (now known as the March of Dimes). His leadership in this organization is one reason he is commemorated on the dime.



Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library

*Franklin D. Roosevelt with Ruthie Bie, the granddaughter of a friend, and presidential pet Fala at Hilltop Cottage in Hyde Park, New York, 1941.*

1934

### **California Council of the Blind**

At the age of 23, Jacobus tenBroek, blind since age 14, joins with Dr. Newel Perry and others to form the California Council of the Blind, which later becomes the National Federation of the Blind of California, a model for the nationwide organization he forms six years later.

1935

### **Signing of the Social Security Act**

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act, establishing a program of permanent assistance to adults with disabilities.



Social Security Administration

*President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing Social Security Act, August 14, 1935.*

1937

### 1935 Disability Protest Results in WPA Jobs

To protest the fact that their requests for employment with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) have been stamped 'PH' (physically handicapped), 300 members of the League for the Physically Handicapped stage a nine-day sit in at the Home Relief Bureau of New York City. Eventually, they help secure several thousand jobs nationwide. The League of the Physically Handicapped is accepted as the first organization of people with disabilities by people with disabilities.

### Ray Charles Blind by Age Seven

At the age of seven Ray Charles Robinson (1930–2004) loses his sight completely due to glaucoma, which he's had since the time of his birth in Albany, Georgia. He learns to read music in Braille and eventually drops his last name while performing on the Florida blues circuit.



Wikipedia

*Ray Charles rehearses for 1990 Grammys. Photo by Victor Diaz Lamich.*

1939

### Nazi Program Kills Thousands

At the onset of World War II Adolph Hitler orders widespread "mercy killing" of the sick and disabled. Code-named *Aktion T4*, the Nazi euthanasia program is instituted to eliminate "life unworthy of life." Between 75,000 to 250,000 people with intellectual or physical disabilities are systematically killed from 1939 to 1941.



Wikipedia

*Schloss Hartheim, Austria, one of the main T4 killing centers.*

### Lou Gehrig Day

On July 4, 1939, Lou Gehrig Day is held at Yankee Stadium in New York City. The first baseman, nicknamed the Iron Horse, had been diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), but that day tells the world, "Today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth." His statement resounds long after his death in 1941.



National Institutes of Health

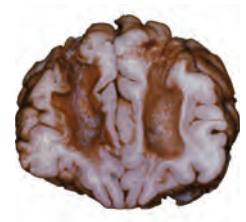
*Lou Gehrig (1903–1941)*

1940

1941

### **Rosemary Kennedy Institutionalized after Failed Lobotomy**

John F. Kennedy's twenty-three year old sister Rosemary undergoes a prefrontal lobotomy as a "cure" for lifelong mild retardation and aggressive behavior that surfaces in late adolescence. The operation fails, resulting in total incapacity. To avoid scandal, Rosemary is moved permanently to the St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children in Wisconsin. Her sister, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, later founds the Special Olympics in Rosemary's honor.



Wikipedia

*A human brain that has undergone lobotomy, destroying large sections of the prefrontal cortex.*

1948

### **Rusk's Theories Become Basis for Rehabilitation Medicine**

Dr. Howard A. Rusk founds the Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine in New York City, where he develops techniques to improve the health of injured veterans from World War II. His theory focused on treating the emotional, psychological and social aspects of individuals with disabilities and later became the basis for modern rehabilitation medicine.

1950

1950

### **Beginning of National Barrier-Free Standards**

In the 1950s, disabled veterans and people with disabilities begin the barrier-free movement. The combined efforts of the Veterans Administration, The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, and the National Easter Seals Society, among others, results in the development of national standards for "barrier-free" buildings.



National Library of Medicine

### **The ARC Champions Abilities of Mentally Retarded**

Parents of youth diagnosed with mental retardation found the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC). The association works to change the public's ideas about mental retardation. Its members educate parents and others, demonstrating that individuals with mental retardation have the ability to succeed in life. The ARC works to ensure that the estimated 7.2 million Americans with mental retardation and related developmental disabilities have the services and supports they need to grow, develop, and live in communities across the nation.



National Library of Medicine

*Photo of NIH physician examining girl with Down's syndrome.*

1953

### Radiation Experiment Conducted Without Consent

Clemens Benda, clinical director at the Fernald School in Waltham, Massachusetts, an institution for boys with mental retardation, invites 100 teenage students to participate in a “science club” in which they will be privy to special outings and extra snacks. In a letter requesting parental consent, Benda mentions an experiment in which “blood samples are taken after a special breakfast meal containing a certain amount of calcium,” but makes no mention of the inclusion of radioactive substances that are fed to the boys in their oatmeal.

1957

### Billy Barty Organizes Little People

Actor Billy Barty makes a national appeal to the little people of America to converge on Reno, Nevada. Twenty answer the call, creating the Midgets of America organization. Later renamed the Little People of America, his organization becomes the largest in the world devoted to people of short stature.



Little People of America

1960

1961

### First Accessibility Standard Published

The American Standards Association, later known as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), publishes the first accessibility standard titled, *Making Buildings Accessible to and Usable by the Physically Handicapped*. Forty-nine states adapt accessibility legislation by 1973.

### Stevie Wonder Discovered

Ronnie White (of The Miracles) discovers 11-year-old Steveland Judkins and arranges an audition with Motown CEO, Berry Gordy, who immediately signs the boy as “Little Stevie Wonder.”



Wikipedia

Photo by  
Agência Brasil.



UC Berkeley Library

*Don Galloway, manager of blind services, and Ed Roberts, executive director, of the fledgling Center for Independent Living at Berkeley in 1974.*

1962

### Ed Roberts Fights for Admission to University

Ed Roberts, a young man with polio, enrolls at the University of California, Berkeley. After his admission is rejected, he fights to get the decision overturned. He becomes the father of the Independent Living Movement and helps establish the first Center for Independent Living (CIL).

1963

### **Federal Funding Set Aside for Disability Infrastructure Support**

*The Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act of 1963* passes. The act sets aside money for developing State Developmental Disabilities Councils, Protection and Advocacy Systems, and University Centers. In 1984 it is renamed the *Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act*.

1964

### **Civil Rights Bill Bypasses Persons with Disabilities**

*The Civil Rights Act* is passed. While this act helps end discrimination against African Americans and women in the workplace, it does not make any provision for people with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities still lack opportunities to participate in and be contributing members of society, are denied access to employment, and are discriminated against based on disability.

### **Baudot Merged with TTY Communication**

In California, deaf orthodontist Dr. James C. Marsters of Pasadena sends a teletype machine (TTY) to deaf scientist Robert Weitbrecht, asking him to find a way to attach the TTY to the telephone system. Weitbrecht modifies an acoustic coupler, giving birth to "Baudot," a code that is still used in TTY communication.



Wikipedia

*Robert Weitbrecht shows off his TTY device. He is awarded a doctorate from Gallaudet College in 1974.*

1965

### **Medicaid Help for Low-Income and Disabled**

Title XIX (19) of the *Social Security Act* creates a cooperative federal/state entitlement program, known as Medicaid, that pays medical costs for certain individuals with disabilities and families with low incomes.

1968

### **First International Special Olympics Games**

Eunice Kennedy Shriver founds the Special Olympics in 1962 to provide athletic training and competition for persons with intellectual disabilities. The organization grows into an international program enabling more than one million young people and adults to participate in 23 Olympic-type sports events each year. The first International Special Olympics Games are held in Chicago, Illinois in 1968.



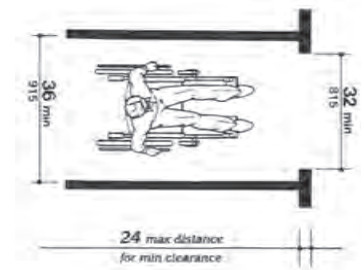
Wikipedia

*Opening Ceremonies for the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games, Dublin.*

1968

**Act Requires Accessible Buildings**

*The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968* mandates the removal of what is perceived to be the most significant obstacle to employment for people with disabilities—the physical design of the buildings and facilities on the job. The act requires that all buildings designed, constructed, altered, or leased with federal funds to be made accessible.



Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards

*The Access Board develops and maintains Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS), which serve as the basis for enforcing the law.*

1970

1970

**Educator and Disability Activist**

Judy Heumann sues the New York City Board of Education when her application for a teaching license is denied. The stated reason is the same originally used to bar her from kindergarten—that her wheelchair is a fire hazard. The suit, settled out of court, launches Heumann’s activism. She later founds the Independent Living movement with Ed Roberts and oversees education and VR programs in the United States during the 1990s.

1972

**Governor Wallace of Alabama Paralyzed**

Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama is paralyzed after being shot during a presidential campaign rally in Laurel, Maryland.



Wikipedia

*Governor Wallace (1919–1998). Detail from photo by NASA, June 9, 1965.*

1973

**Public Entities Can’t Discriminate**

Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* makes it illegal for federal agencies, public universities, and other public institutions receiving any federal funds to discriminate on the basis of disability.

1974

**Inaugural Convention of People First**

The first convention for People First is held in Portland, Oregon. People First is a national organization of people with developmental disabilities learning to speak for themselves and supporting each other in doing so.



Library of Congress

## Last of “Ugly Laws” Repealed

The last “Ugly Law” is repealed in Chicago, Illinois, in 1974. These laws allowed police to arrest and jail people with “apparent” disabilities for no reason other than being disfigured or demonstrating some type of disability.

1975

## Law Guarantees Free, Appropriate, Public Education for All Disabled Children

*The Education for Handicapped Children Act of 1975*—now called the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*—is signed into law. It guarantees a free, appropriate, public education for all children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

## Staten Island’s Willowbrook State School Finally Shuttered

After a five year battle with parents and advocates, New York Governor Hugh Carey signs the Willowbrook consent order, closing down a state institution notorious for its horrible conditions—broken plumbing, not enough doctors or medical supplies, patients living in filthy residences with no clean clothing, to name a few. Governor Carey pledges to relocate patients in community-based settings. Willowbrook remains open until 1978, but forever changes ideas about community-based care for people with developmental disabilities.

1976

## Deaf Actress Signs On with *Sesame Street*

Deaf actress Linda Bove, graduate of Gallaudet College and veteran of the National Theater for the Deaf, signs a long-term contract to play Linda the librarian on public television’s *Sesame Street*. James Earl Jones, a well known actor who has a speech-related disability, also gets his start on *Sesame Street*.

1977

## Disability Demonstrators Occupy Federal Office

Demonstrators led by Judy Heumann take over the Health Education and Welfare (HEW) office in UN Plaza, San Francisco, California, in protest of HEW Secretary Califano’s refusal to complete regulations for Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, which made it illegal for federal agencies, public universities, and other public institutions receiving any federal funds to discriminate on the basis of disability. After 25 days, Califano relents and signs the regulations into effect, making this take-over event the longest occupation of a federal office by protestors in U.S. history.



Wikipedia

*Photo of Joseph A. Califano, Jr., who served as HEW secretary, 1977 to 1979.*



1978

### **Disability Activists Protest Inaccessibility of Denver Buses**

In Denver, Colorado, nineteen members of the Atlantis Community block buses with their wheelchairs—chanting “We will ride!”—to demonstrate against the inaccessibility of public transportation.



Wikipedia

*WMATA metrobus (1987), Washington, DC. Photo by Ben Schumin, 2005.*

### **Organization for Hispanic Children with Disabilities**

Fiesta Educativa (Education Fest) is formed to address the lack of Spanish-speaking support services to families with disabled children in southern California.

### **National Council on Disability Established**

The National Council on Disability is established as an advisory board within the Department of Education. Its purpose is to promote policies, programs, practices, and procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for all people with disabilities, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability, and to empower them to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society.



Library of Congress

*National Council on Disabilities logo*

1980

1980

### **Institutions Can't Hold People Against Their Will**

The Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) gives the Department of Justice power to sue state or local institutions that violate the rights of people held against their will, including those residing for care or treatment of mental illness.

### **Diagnostic Criteria for Attention Deficit Disorder**

The term *Attention Deficit Disorder* is included for the first time in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

1982

### **Down's Infant Allowed To Die**

On April 9, "Baby Doe" is born with Down's syndrome and an under-developed esophagus. Doctors advise the parents not to opt for surgery and to allow him to die. On April 15, the child dies in an incubator.

### **UN Encourages Global Equality and Participation for the Disabled**

The United Nations General Assembly adopts "The World Program of Action Concerning the Disabled" in 1982 to encourage full participation and equality for people with disabilities around the world.

### **Reich Finds National Organization on Disability**

Alan A. Reich founds the National Organization on Disability (NOD) in 1982. NOD's mission is to expand the participation and contribution of Americans with disabilities in all aspects of life and to close the participation gap by raising disability awareness through programs and information. As president of NOD, Reich builds the coalition of disability groups that successfully fight for the inclusion of a statue of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his wheelchair at the FDR Memorial. Reich is an international leader in the disability community until his death in 2005.

1983

### **ADAPT Campaigns for Transportation Access**

Americans with Disabilities for Accessible Public Transportation, now known as ADAPT, began its national campaign for lifts on buses and access to public transit for people with disabilities. For seven years ADAPT—under the leadership of Bob Kafka, Stephanie Thomas, and Mike Auberger—blocked buses in cities across the U.S. to demonstrate the need for access to public transit. After the passage of the ADA (and transit measures gained by ADAPT's hard work), ADAPT began to focus on attendant and community based services, becoming American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today.

1986

### **Air Carriers Can't Discriminate Against Disabled**

*The Air Carrier Access Act* is implemented, which prohibits discrimination by domestic and foreign air carriers against qualified individuals with physical or mental disabilities. It applies only to air carriers that provide regularly scheduled services for hire to the public. Requirements include boarding assistance and certain accessibility features in newly built aircraft and new or altered airport facilities.



Wikipedia

*WinAir Airlines Boeing 737-236. Photo by David Mueller in Long Beach, California, 1999.*

1988

### **Gallaudet's "Deaf President Now" Protest**

Students, faculty, and the community at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. organize a week-long protest on campus demanding the selection of a deaf president for the university. The protest is called "Deaf President Now" and the Dr. I. King Jordan is named.



Gallaudet University

*Dr. I. King Jordan speaks to the press. Photo courtesy of the Gallaudet University Archives.*

### **Mandated Accessible Housing in New Projects**

*The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988* expands on the *Civil Rights Act of 1968* to require that a certain number of accessible housing units be created in all new multi-family housing. The act covers both public and private homes and not only those in receipt of federal funding.

### **Disabled Writer Burns Book In Protest**

Paul Longmore, noted disability historian, burns a copy of his book in front of the federal building in Los Angeles in protest of work disincentives, which stopped him from receiving payment as an author to keep his medical benefits.

### **Assistive Technology Initiative**

*Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988* is passed. This piece of legislation increases access to, availability of, and funding for assistive technology through state and national initiatives.



Library of Congress

*Braille portable digital assistant (PDA) device*

1989

### **McAfee Chooses Life, Becomes Advocate**

Larry McAfee is granted the right, by a Georgia court, to be given a sedative and be taken off a ventilator in order to end his life. He changes his mind and becomes a disability-rights advocate.

1990

**Americans with Disabilities Act Becomes Law**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is signed into law by President George H. W. Bush (R) alongside its “founding father,” Justin Dart. The ADA is considered the most important civil rights law since Title 504 and has cross-disability support, bringing disability-specific organizations, advocates, and supporters all together for the same cause. Sitting alongside Dart and the President were Senators Harkin and Weiker and Congressmen Owens, Coehlo, and Hoyer.



Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

*Detail from photo showing Justin Dart at the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act by President Bush, 1990.*

**Terry Schiavo Suffers Severe Brain Damage**

Terry Schiavo is severely brain damaged after her heart stops because of a chemical imbalance that is believed to have been brought on by an eating disorder. Court-appointed doctors rule she is in a “persistent vegetative state” with no real consciousness or chance of recovery. Over a decade later, her case will spark much controversy and receive national media attention.

1992

**California Hosts First Youth Leadership Forum**

The first Youth Leadership Forum for youth with disabilities is developed in California by the Governor’s Committee for Employment of Disabled Persons. The U.S. Department of Labor funds other states to develop similar forums. By 2007, youth leadership forums are taking place in 23 states.



California Youth Leadership Forum

1995

**American Association of People with Disabilities**

Paul Hearne, a longtime leader in the disability community, achieves his dream of creating a national association to give people with disabilities more consumer power and a stronger public voice, with the creation of the American Association of People with Disabilities.

### Christopher Reeve Paralyzed in 1995

Christopher Reeve's horse fails to complete a rail jump at an annual riding competition in Virginia. Reeve is thrown and sustains a severe C1–C2 vertebrae fracture that paralyzes him from the neck down. Best known for his *Superman* role, after the injury Reeve begins his own battle, searching for a cure to spinal cord injury. Though he dies in 2004 without seeing a cure, he receives both admiration and criticism for his attempts at finding one, leaving a legacy of ongoing research around spinal cord injuries.



Wikipedia

*Christopher Reeve (1952–2004) discusses the potential benefits of stem cell research at a neuroscience conference at MIT, March 2, 2003.*

1996

### Accessible Computer and Telecomm Equipment

*The Telecommunications Act* passes and requires that computers, telephones, closed captioning, and many other telecommunication devices and equipment be made accessible.



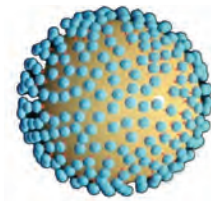
Library of Congress

*Ergonomic split keyboard*

1998

### Dentist Must Treat HIV-Positive Patient

The Supreme Court, in *Bragdon v. Abbott*, extends ADA benefits to a woman with HIV who sued a dentist who refused to fill a cavity for fear of getting the disease himself. Persons with HIV/AIDS are considered disabled under the ADA.



NIAD, NIH

*Computer model of AIDS virus (HIV) by Richard Feldmann.*

### Disabled Golfer Has Right To Use Cart in PGA

A federal judge rules that golfer Casey Martin—the first pro athlete to utilize the ADA to play a competitive sport—does have the right to use a golf cart in the PGA Tour tournaments due to a rare circulatory disorder that severely limits his ability to walk an entire course.



Department of Justice

*Casey Martin, 2000.*

1999

### Soccer League Ordered To Allow Disabled Player

In November, a U.S. District Court judge issues an emergency court order telling the Lawton, Oklahoma, Evening Optimist Soccer League to allow Ryan Taylor, a nine-year-old with cerebral palsy, to play in the league. His walker, referred to as a safety hazard by the defendants, is padded during games.

## Benefits Protected for Some Who Return To Work

*The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvements Act of 1999* (TWWIA) expands the availability of Medicare and Medicaid so that certain disabled beneficiaries who return to work will not lose their medical benefits—the same issue Paul Longmore protests against back in 1988.

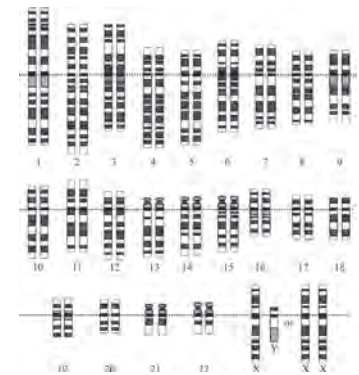


Library of Congress

Crowd at disability rights gathering.

## Unnecessary Institutionalization Discriminatory

In *Olmstead v. L.C.* the U.S. Supreme Court rules that unnecessary institutionalization of people with disabilities constitutes discrimination and violates the ADA, that individuals have a right to receive benefits in the “most integrated setting appropriate to their needs,” and that failure to find community-based placements for qualifying people with disabilities is illegal discrimination.



Wikipedia

*A graphical representation of the normal human karyotype, part of the DNA sequencing process undertaken to map of the human genome.*

2000

2000

## Genome Project Maps Human DNA Sequence

The Human Genome Project nears completion. President Clinton and leading scientists announce the completion of a “rough draft” of the DNA sequence (linked strands of protein, the “building blocks” of life) for human life. While some advocates are encouraged with the hope of finding cures and medical breakthroughs, others fear an end of “disability” altogether.

2004

## First Disability Pride Parade in Chicago

A coalition of disability rights advocates and organizations holds the first Disability Pride Parade. Organizers expect 500–600 people to attend the event, which is designed to “change the way people think about and define disability, to break down and end the internalized shame among people with disabilities, and to promote the belief in society that disability is a natural and beautiful part of life.” Almost 2,000 attend.



Feminist Response in Disability Activism (F.R.I.D.A.)

### Tennessee Sued for Inaccessible Courts

In 2004, the United States Supreme Court hears *Tennessee v. Lane*, a case in which individuals sue the state of Tennessee for failing to ensure that courthouses are accessible to people with disabilities. One plaintiff is arrested when he refuses to crawl or be carried up stairs. The state argues that they can not be sued under Title II of the ADA. The Supreme Court decides in favor of people with disabilities, however, ruling that Tennessee can be sued for damages under Title II for failing to provide access to the courts.



Wikipedia

*U.S. Supreme Court building*

### Funding for Youth Information Centers

The Administration for Developmental Disabilities begins to fund Youth Information Centers (YICs). Modeled after Parent Training and Information Centers, YICs are designed to be run by and for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities, promoting a youth-led agenda and providing services within the disability community.

### Cuts in Tennessee Medicaid Leads to Sit-In

Upset by Governor Bredesen's massive cuts to the state Medicaid System, TennCare, disability advocates in Tennessee begin a sit-in at the Governor's office that lasts 75 days, replacing the record set in 1977 by the HEW office takeover.



State of Tennessee

*Phil Bredesen, Governor, State of Tennessee*

### Schivao's Husband Has Right To Let Her Die

Terry Schivao's husband Michael is given the right to remove her feeding tube. Terry dies at the age of 41 after living 15 years in a "persistent vegetative" state. Despite numerous protests by her parents, she dies from dehydration after the feeding tube is removed by court order. The case gains national attention and continues to direct public focus on living wills and other forms of life/estate planning. Schiavo left no written instructions concerning her wishes if she were to ever become so severely disabled.

### Gallaudet Students Protest New President

I. King Jordan resigns from Gallaudet University. Students protest the hiring of his replacement, citing issues such as not being raised using American Sign Language (ASL) and her lack of familiarity with deaf culture.



Library of Congress

Gallaudet University,  
Washington, DC

### History of Disability Rights Enters Curricula

The first bill requiring that students in a K–12 public school system be taught the history of the disability rights movement is passed, largely due to the efforts of 20 young people with disabilities from the state of West Virginia.

### 50-State Road-To-Freedom Tour

The Road-to-Freedom tour kicked off on November 15th. This 50-state bus tour and photographic exhibit chronicles the history of the grassroots “people’s movement” that led to passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).



Tom Olin

*Sources for some events on this timeline include information excerpted from Project YIELDD (Youth Information, Education and Leadership for Developmental Disabilities); Access Living, Chicago; and Parallels in Time from the Minnesota Developmental Disabilities Council.*

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# National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth



Yoshiko Dart

## DISABILITY HISTORY TIMELINE:

### Discussion Guide for Program Staff

This resource and discussion guide is designed to help youth with disabilities and emerging leaders within the disability community learn about the rich history of people with disabilities. Increasing their knowledge of disability history will help them inspire and lead others by telling the diverse stories of the many who have gone before. Starting shortly after the United States was founded, the disabilities timeline features examples of the remarkable diversity, creativity, and leadership that has shaped the disability community up through today.



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**Note:** Although designed for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities, the Disability History Timeline and related activities can be used to educate a broader audience. For example, the materials may be useful for training service providers on the importance of educating youth with disabilities about their history or as an orientation for program staff before working with youth with disabilities.

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### STAFF NAME:

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# Disability History Timeline

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Why Study Disability History?

Research, conducted by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth in the field of transition, shows that youth with disabilities need exposure to disability history, understanding of disability public policy, and connections to role models and mentors in the disability community.

Much of the Disability History Timeline was compiled, reviewed, refined, and chosen by youth and emerging leaders with disabilities. To reflect the diversity of the disability community, they also researched the many different disability populations to include as many as possible.

These materials are part of a growing body of work that intends to help individuals working with youth with disabilities become empowered as leaders, and to learn about the rich history of people with disabilities in the United States.

These following activity and worksheets were also developed by youth and emerging leaders with disabilities.

### ACTIVITY: Disability History Timeline

Conduct this activity prior to distributing the Disability History Timeline to participants. Use the exercise as a means for introducing the timeline and subsequent worksheets.

### PURPOSE

To give participants a base of knowledge about the history of people with disabilities in the United States, which starts shortly after the nation's founding up until the present day. Rather than just handing out the timeline, this activity is designed to help apply information in a personal way to promote empowerment of participants. It works best when it's interactive.

### TIME

45 minutes for preparation  
20 minutes for the introductory activity  
30-45 minutes for corrections  
30-45 minutes for worksheet discussions

### Preparation

1. Become familiar with the dates and events depicted in the Disability History Timeline.
2. Decide whether or not you want youth to work individually or within groups. If working individually, use one date per student. If working in groups, staff can assign 3 or 4 events per group.
3. Select a number of specific dates to use in the activity, making sure to include a diverse group of disabilities across a wide spectrum of the timeline.
4. Print out the selected dates, with each date displayed horizontally across a piece of white 8.5" X 11" paper. Under page setup select the landscape option. (See below).
5. Make sure that the dates are printed large enough to be read from the back of the room. (Use a 200-point font size).
6. Print out the events that correspond with the selected dates. Make sure to print each event in a large font size on white paper. Print using the landscape option as well.



1787

**Note:** After conducting multiple trainings and testing out various date/event combinations, you may want to laminate a master set of the selected dates and events to cut printing costs and make the activity easier to repeat.

## **Implementation**

1. Post the dates on the wall from left to right, starting with the first date and ending with the last date.
2. Mix up the event cards and distribute them among the participants. Give participants 20 minutes to post event cards on the wall under the dates that best match the events.

## **Facilitation**

**Note:** *This part usually takes the longest.*

1. Give a 5 minute warning, then after the 20 minutes are up, walk through the timeline discussing which events go where.

For example, a group guesses that Deaf President Now took place in 1782. Ask, "What about this event made you think it took place then?" Or say, "Well, it actually took place in 1988 and let's talk about why."

2. When facilitating this portion be sure to:
  - a. Define concepts and ideas in accessible language (e.g., *sheltered workshops*, *eugenics*, *sterilization*).
  - b. Make the connections between the events described and the models of disability in use at the time, as well as policies that have an impact on people with disabilities.

For example, discuss how *imbecile* changed to *mental retardation*, then *mental retardation* changed to *developmental disability*, and now *developmental disability* has changed to *intellectual disability*.

3. After reviewing the timeline and making the necessary corrections (i.e., moving an event from the incorrect date to the correct one), distribute the Disability History Timeline to participants.

Suggested introduction: "This is a timeline of your history. It may not be a history you're familiar with, but it is the history of people with disabilities in the United States starting in 1782 and continuing on until 2006."

4. Distribute discussion questions—using either Worksheets 1, 2, or 3 or all three—for completion by the participants on their own or to facilitate discussion among all of the participants.

### **DISCUSSION WORKSHEET 1: Processing the Timeline**

### **DISCUSSION WORKSHEET 2: Discussion Geometry**

This activity has been adapted by the National Consortium on Leadership and Disability/Youth from an activity facilitated by the Institute for Educational Leadership.

### **DISCUSSION WORKSHEET 3: Look Into Your Crystal Ball**

#### **Implementation**

This exercise can be completed independently using the worksheets or worksheet questions can be used to facilitate discussion in large or small groups with youth and emerging leaders.

# Discussion Worksheet 1

## Disability History Timeline DISCUSSION GUIDE

### PROCESSING THE TIMELINE

After you've had a chance to read some of the different events important in the history of people with disabilities in the Disabilities History Timeline, take some time to do some processing. How does this information impact us, our community, and society?

Some people—both those with and without disabilities—think that the events depicted on the Disability History Timeline are only important for people with the types of disabilities listed. As a community, however, it's important to share each other's victories and to see them as steps in

the progress for people with all different types of disabilities. As people with disabilities, our history is important on many levels.

#### Instructions:

*Select three events you found interesting. After listing the first one, explain/discuss why the event is important to you as a person with a disability. For the second event, explain/discuss why the event is important to the disability community as a whole. For the third event, explain/discuss why it's important that people without disabilities learn about this event.*

#### EVENT 1:

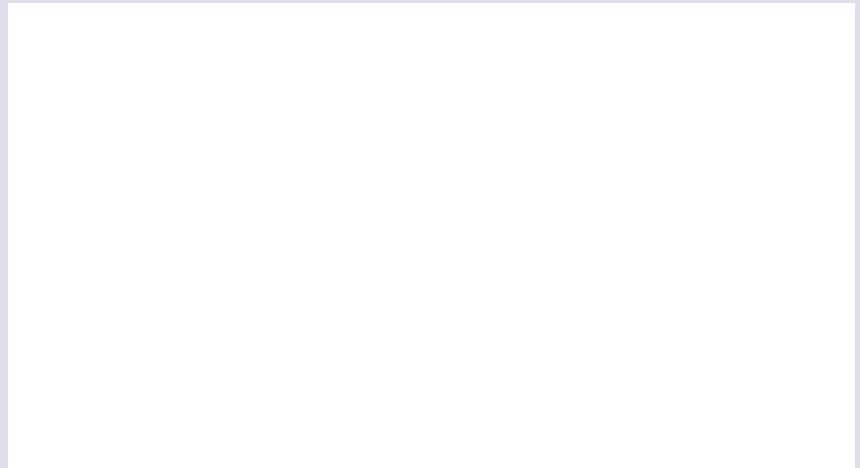
**Why is this event important to me as a leader?**

#### EVENT 2:

**Why is this event important to the disability community?**

**EVENT 3:**

**How could the  
non-disabled  
community benefit  
by knowing more  
about this event?**



**NOTES:**

# Discussion Worksheet 2

## Disability History Timeline DISCUSSION GUIDE

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### DISCUSSION GEOMETRY

Now that you've had a chance to glance through the Disability History Timeline and read about some of the different events important in the history of people with disabilities, it's time to do some processing. How does the information

impact us and how do we react to it? Discussion Geometry provides a simple way to do this and helps us organize our ideas and responses to the Disability History Timeline. Just answer the questions below.

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#### CIRCLE

**What is one idea or event that's going around and around in your head after reading or discussing the timeline?**

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#### SQUARE

**What is one idea or event that squares (or is similar) to what you already knew?**

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**TRIANGLE**

**What are three things that you're going to take away from this activity?**



**HEXAGON**

**What idea or event on the timeline made you feel uncomfortable or awkward, and why?**



# Discussion Worksheet **3**

## Disability History Timeline DISCUSSION GUIDE

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### LOOK INTO YOUR CRYSTAL BALL

You've just had a chance to read and learn about a lot of different people and events in the Disability History Timeline that have had an impact on the lives of people with disabilities. Knowing about your past is important when thinking about what you want for your future! Take a moment to think about the future.

In the space below, write or draw what you want to happen in the future that will improve the lives of people with disabilities. Remember, these are your predictions and goals! Make them about issues important to you.

Example: *In five years anyone with a disability will live at home with their families instead of in nursing homes!*

---

**In five years:**

**In ten years:**

**In twenty years:**

**In fifty years:**

**In one hundred years:**

**What are three things  
you're going to do to  
help achieve one of  
your goals by the time  
you predicted?**





# National Consortium on Leadership and Disability/Youth

The National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth (NCLD/Y) is a youth-led resource, information, and training center for youth and emerging leaders with developmental disabilities, housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership and funded by a grant/contract/cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities (Number #90DN0206). The project is led by the next generation of young leaders with disabilities and takes a positive development approach toward preparing youth for the transition to adulthood and leadership roles within with the disability community. To assist in this preparation, all program materials are based on the five areas of youth development/leadership—**learning, connecting, thriving, working, and leading.**

NCLD/Youth supports and promotes youth with disabilities and emerging leaders in the disability community, by following these objectives:

- To identify and develop high quality, disability-specific curricula designed around the five areas of youth development and leadership;
- To test, refine, and disseminate instructional materials across multiple states, building networks of national, state, and local partnerships of peer mentors, adult advisors, and Councils of youth and emerging leaders;
- To develop, train, and mentor youth and emerging young leaders with developmental disabilities in each partner state to influence state and local-level public policy involving youth development and leadership; and,
- To educate school leaders, policymakers, families, and other youth about the importance of including disability history and awareness in all K–12 curricula.

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Nor does mention of tradenames, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Visit the NCLD/Y Web site at: [www.nclد-youth.info](http://www.nclد-youth.info).



For more information on this, or other products developed by the National Consortium on Leadership and Disability/Youth, please contact Rebecca Cokley at [cokleyr@iel.org](mailto:cokleyr@iel.org).

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