



A LOOK BACK AT THE ADA 30 YEARS LATER

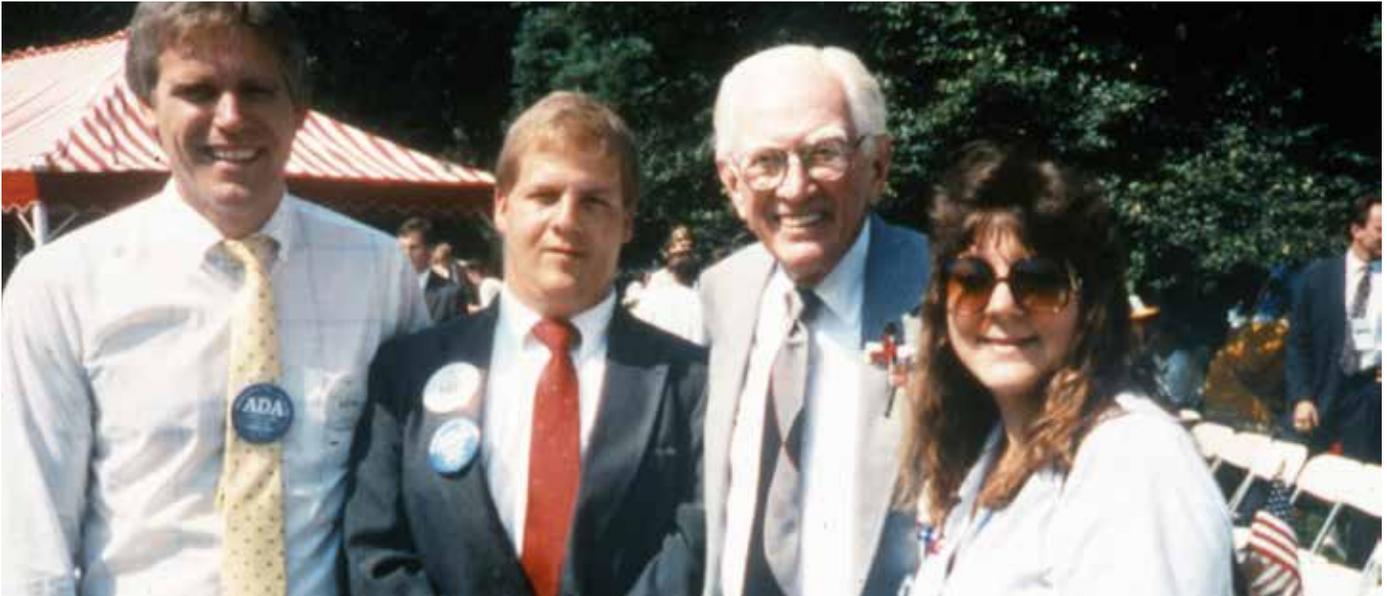
Those of us living with disabilities old enough to remember life pre-ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) have vivid memories of life without curb cuts and accessible parking spots, no blue pads and automatic doors, and without access to most stores, restaurants, schools and businesses, and the ability to easily access and ride public transportation. We remember no braille signage, auditory crosswalk signaling, or video description for blind and visually impaired; no interpreters, ability to call for pizza or for a doctor's appointment as a deaf person. Some of us remember special schools across town – with only kids like us, having few options or expectations for higher education, for accessible housing or employment. With very limited accessible living opportunities, many of us had few options but to reside in congregate housing situations like nursing homes, or state-funded apartment complexes identified for the handicapped.

For people with disabilities and our families, everything was harder back then – everything. We had little to no recourse for making things better short of asking politely and hoping for the best. We could sue for access – for our "inalienable" rights to belong and participate – but in the eyes of many, we were merely "angry cripples." Why weren't we happy with what we had?

Demanding accommodation, we had no teeth legally, no right to complain.

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Ability Center Executive Director Tim (center left) and Chris Harrington (far right) with Dale Abell and then Ohio Senator Howard Metzenbaum at the July 26, 1990 signing of the ADA on the White House lawn.

Seeing parallels with and taking cues from Dr. King and the Civil Rights movement, many of us – staff included – came together as a group, got loud, and took to the streets. In the 60s and 70s, we fought for equal education under the law and access to federal buildings. In the 80s, we fought for curb cuts so we could safely cross streets. We marched for access to Greyhound buses and public transportation. (If you do not drive, how do you travel, visit relatives, go to the store, or movies, to the doctor or work?) Accessible and reliable transportation was – and still is – vital to living and enjoying independent, successful lives.

THE ADA TODAY

Looking around the community with an eye on access and accommodation, there is indeed much to be thankful for. The ADA has laid a strong foundation for us and for younger generations moving forward, there is much work yet to do as we strive to create the “most disability-friendly community in the country.”

These past thirty years we have spent the majority of our advocacy energy working to implement, fine-tune, and protect the rights afforded us under the ADA. It remains the most important work we do and drives our other programs and services.

For all these reasons, we take time this year to honor and celebrate this, the 30th anniversary of the law intended to set us free – the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We also pay homage to all who went before, who fought so hard, who risked everything, who put their bodies on the ground, in front of and under buses, who chained themselves to doors and to each other, who rallied, marched, chanted and went to jail, who crawled up steps and dared to dream of a life with all we have now and more. In their honor, we continue to fight the good fight.

This article was written by Dan Wilkins, Director of Special Projects. View photos and testimonials about the passage of the ADA on abilitycenter.org/ada. Please view our Facebook for ADA activities and webinar schedule.

Happy Anniversary, ADA

INDEPENDENTLY LIVING THROUGH COVID-19

As a service organization for people with disabilities, we understand our population is one of the at-risk groups for contracting this virus. Staff jumped into action and began connecting with consumers, delivering assistance where needed.

- Completed over **1,200 wellness calls** to youth and adult consumers
- **Created care packages** for consumers in need
- **Launched a webinar series** designed to tackle issues facing the disability community during the pandemic
- Produced a **reopening fact sheet** for local businesses to ensure accessibility with their reopening guidelines
- **Appointed as the functional needs coordinator** for Lucas County's Emergency Management Agency, which planned Lucas County's disaster response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Developed tutorials** for web-based apps for youth consumers to connect
- **Chosen to serve** on the Northwest Ohio Region 1 Healthcare Multi-Agency Coordination System COVID-19 Response Task force



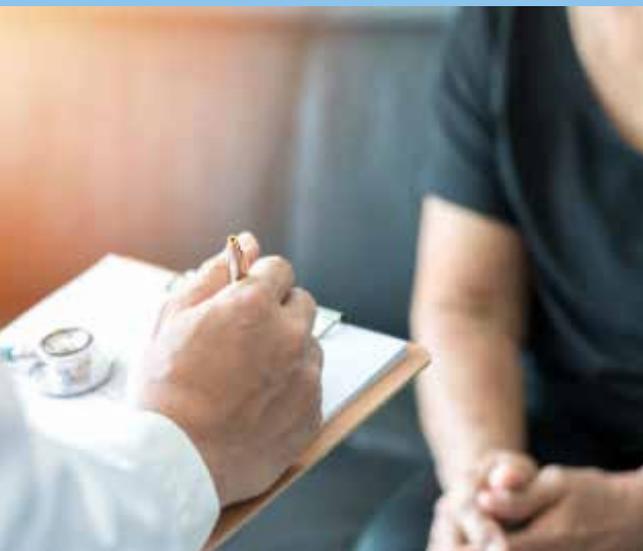
Rex McCarty receives his care package

ADVOCACY MEETS HEALTH CARE

The Ability Center worked with the Northwest Ohio Hospital Council to ensure people with disabilities would have access to health care should our regional hospitals be overwhelmed by patients from COVID-19. Disability Rights Attorney Katie Hunt Thomas worked with a task force of doctors to bring model guidelines for scarce resource allocation into compliance with the ADA.

The ADA specifies that disability cannot be used as a factor in whether or not to offer a person medical treatment, and the final guidelines ensured that decisions about medical treatment in an emergency would be made regardless of whether a person has a disability.

Updated guidelines for assessing patients with disabilities when in a scarce resource healthcare situation. The modifications brought policies into compliance with ADA.



YOUTH PROGRAMS GO VIRTUAL

Schools closed, in-person classes halted, and students in our Youth and Transition Program were left searching for a way to connect.

A tutorial was developed that showed youth and teens how to use websites like Zoom, Google Hangout, Skype, and Netflix to chat with friends and family.

The newly developed Assistive Technology Lending Closet, known as Tech for REC (recreation, education, employment, and community) was inspired by data collected from our COVID-19 surveys. Information gathered showed many consumers needed internet and did not have access to equipment. Consumers may borrow assistive technology items for short term purposes, trial use, evaluation, to make an informed purchase, or participate in virtual programming offered by The Ability Center.

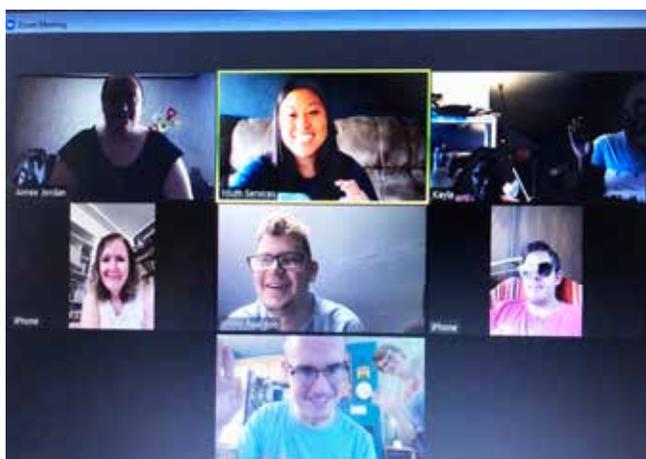
Items available:

- Kindle Fire tablet
- iPad
- Chromebook

Switch adapted toys and leisure items are also available for loan through a grant from the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation.

Independent play, leisure activities, and social participation are the primary goals of the adaptive toy selection. The Ability Center will continue to expand this program through funds from donations, grants, and collaboration with organizations such as AT Ohio.

To learn more, contact The Ability Center at 419.885.5733 or visit abilitycenter.org.



Students connecting with staff over Zoom Virtual Coffee Break meetings. Shown here is the Strategies for Successful Virtual Learning

SUMMER PROGRAMMING REIMAGINED

For the past four summers, local high school students have packed their bags, said goodbye to their parents, and embarked on a journey to find greater independence before entering college - still close to home. This summer's traditional Next Steps Summer Program was not feasible amid the global pandemic. Keeping students safe was the main priority of all partners involved - these virtual options will keep students engaged over the summer months.

Ability Center Summer Youth

- Career Mentorships
- Virtual Life Skills Training
- Employee Readiness
- One-on-one job seeking assistance

Youth Leadership Forum

- Four-day training program for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities
- 20 students will be selected to attend the program put on by The Ability Center, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, and Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council (OSILC)
- Forum will include a meet-and-greet with government officials, a tour of the Toledo City Council Chambers, and innovative programs with community leaders with disabilities



"Participating in the Next Steps Summer Program prepared me for my role on the steering committee by being able to offer insight and reflections of my own experiences to help strengthen the overall future path for others with disabilities."

Conor Smenner

*Youth Leadership Forum Steering Committee,
Current Bowling Green State
University Student*

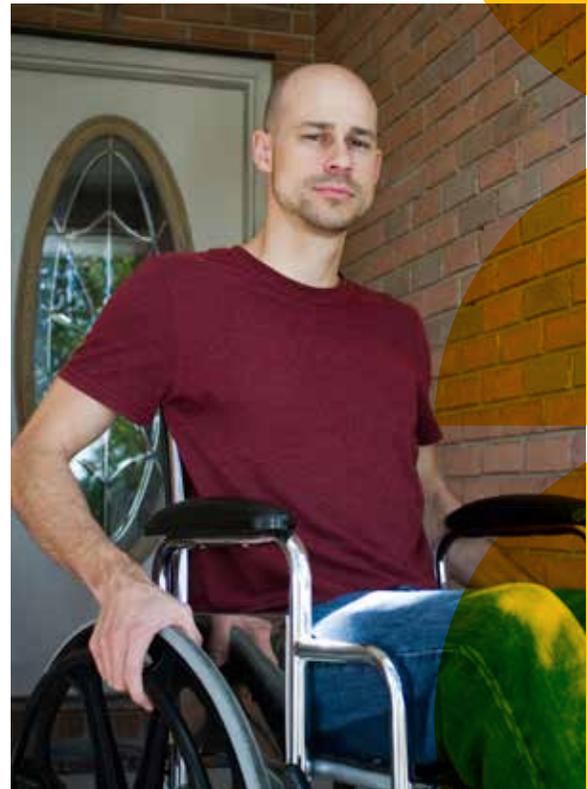
STATEWIDE ADVOCACY VICTORY

As of June 2013, **41,260** people with developmental disabilities were on a waiting list for an Independent Options Waiver from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

Many people with developmental disabilities living in institutions were waiting for waivers to leave, and many people living in the community did not have waivers to remain in their home. In March 2016, The Ability Center joined a class to file a lawsuit against the state in order to challenge the way the Developmental Disabilities system was balanced in Ohio.

The Honorable Judge Sargus granted final approval to a comprehensive settlement agreement in this class action lawsuit on Friday, April 24, 2020.

This outcome will expand access to state funded Individual Options waivers for people who choose a waiver.



WELCOME TO THE ASSISTANCE DOG FAMILY

Graduation usually marks the end of the two-year training period for an assistance dog and the beginning of a lifetime partnership with their forever companion.

Our spring class adapted their team training experience to keep everyone safe while preparing to begin their life with their future partner. Recent grads participated in Zoom classes led by Ability Center staff to complete all the lectures usually contained in team training.

They then came into the Assistance Dogs facility in small groups over a two-day period to learn hands-on lessons with their dogs. Since most pairs were not able to have the traditional needs assessment due to the pandemic, consumers met their dogs for the first time during team training.

Rather than the typical graduation ceremony, foster families came on the first day of class to present their foster dogs to the new graduates. Information about each consumer was read along with the passing of the leash ceremony - a special moment between the foster and the consumer.

Each presentation was taped and will be presented on our Facebook page for all to celebrate together.

SCHOOL THERAPY DOG UPDATES

School therapy dogs are currently being taught via Zoom each week to keep dogs on track with their skills and practice with student teachers to demonstrate tasks learned. Dogs will be in the classroom with students this fall as they adjust back into the school year routine. Comfort from our therapy dogs will be more important than ever. Joining the Assistance Dogs Program School Therapy Dog Program will be the following matches:

- Bryan Elementary School, Bryan, Ohio (**Catcher**)
- Whiteford Agricultural Schools, Ottawa Lake, Michigan (**Derby**)
- Stranahan Elementary School, Sylvania, Ohio (**Betty**)
- Tiffin Middle School, Tiffin, Ohio (**Cooper**)



HANDEL (Therapy Dog)

Handel will work as a facility therapy dog at the Gus Harrison Correctional Facility. Our partnership with the institution has granted us capacity to train more assistance dogs. He was fostered by Tammy Conlan, David and Becky Black, and inmate trainer Mario S. **He was sponsored by Trinity Door Systems.**



DIANE AND ASPEN (Therapy Dog)

Aspen will be paired with Diane from Huntington Woods, MI. Diane lives with Multiple Sclerosis. She shares, "To be able to turn to a dog to love and be loved, as well as to get assistance, will undeniably bring me joy and laughter." Aspen was fostered by Mike Anstadt and inmate trainers Kevin A., David W., and Saad B.



NICK AND FRED (Service Dog)

Nick is a United States veteran who grew up a dog lover all his life. "I know Fred will greatly help the anxiety that I experience on a day-to-day basis. He will be a calming influence and help me recover when I experience flashbacks from my time in the military, especially at night. I thank Lisa and her family and everyone at Assistance Dogs that was involved in this process of putting Fred and I together," shares Nick. Fred was fostered by Lisa Broseke and inmate trainer Nick C. **He was sponsored by Joe Mast and Jessica Aldrich.**



AIDAN AND MARSH
(Therapy Dog)

Aidan just completed the 11th grade when he received the news that he will be receiving a new therapy dog.

Aidan has prior experience with Assistance Dogs; he received his first dog, Jada, ten years ago and she was his first best friend. Aidan's mom, Michele, says, "As Aidan nears adulthood, our priority for him is increasing his independence. We feel a therapy dog plays a big role in that since Aidan will be responsible for his daily care. Aidan thrives when he has responsibilities."

Marsh will be in great hands with Aidan and his family. Michele shares, "Aidan loves helping out and taking care of others. Aidan already says he loves Marsh and we can't wait to see their relationship grow." Marsh was fostered by Maygen O'Hern and inmate trainers Ivan M. and Joseph W.



KOLETON AND TOWNEY
(Therapy Dog)

Koleton is an active ten-year-old boy who loves legos, bike riding, and being outdoors. Koleton had his first experience with school therapy dog, Ike, from Bryan City Schools. After seeing the impact Ike had on Koleton, his mom was encouraged to apply for their very own special needs therapy dog. Towney is a yellow Labrador retriever who loves to play. Koleton's mom says, "We are so blessed to be matched with Towney. She will be able to make Koleton feel calm, relaxed, reduce stress, and make him extremely happy."

Towney was fostered by Patrice Victor and inmate trainer Glenn B. **She was sponsored by the Towne Club.**



ALISON AND STAR
(Service Dog)

In many ways, Alison is a typical college student at Michigan State University. Next semester, she will be living in an apartment independently and attending classes full time. Alison also lives with cerebral palsy.

She explains, "As much as I strive to do everything on my own, there are many obstacles in my way. The world is not always disability friendly and having a service dog allows me to gain the freedom I desire."

Star is a two-year-old black Labrador retriever. Star is trained to pick up dropped items up, open doors, help with laundry, and keep Alison company around campus. She says, "Star will not only be an immense help in me gaining some independence, but a very loved and cherished friend."

Star was fostered by Robin Agen-Blausey and inmate trainer Eric M.



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