Session 3: Self-Advocacy Civil Rights Movement

Our Common History: Fighting for the Rights of People

https://selfadvocacyinfo.org/civil-rights/
African American Civil Rights Movement

LGBTQ+ Civil Rights Movement

Self-Advocacy Civil Rights Movement

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For hundreds of years, people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) had labels like retarded or moron. Some people thought they were dangerous. Parents were told to put these children in institutions.

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Self Advocacy Civil Rights Movement

The self-advocacy civil rights movement started because people with I/DD did not want to be called these labels. In the 1960's a group of people with I/DD in Europe started clubs to plan outings in the community. They made their own choices and mistakes.

Then the Swedish Parents’ Association had a national conference for the people in these clubs. They came together to talk about their lives and concerns.

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In 1973, the “First Convention for Mentally Handicapped in North America” happened in British Columbia. It focused on self-advocacy.

A lot of people from Oregon went to the conference. The people from Oregon decided to start their own group. They named their group People First because they wanted to be called by their names and not their disability label. They decided to have their own conference. Over 600 self-advocates attended that conference in Salem, Oregon in 1974.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEspgzTaJf8
https://selfadvocacyinfo.org/civil-rights/
By 1975, there were 16 People First chapters. In the 1980's the number of self-advocacy chapters continued to grow. The first national self-advocacy conference happened in 1990. It took place in Estes Park, Colorado. Self-Advocates who went to that conference elected a committee to plan a national group.

https://mn.gov/mnddc/parallels/seven/7b/5.html

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The conference was in Nashville. Over 700 people with I/DD came from 32 states. They voted for the national group's leaders. These leaders named the group Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered.


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The Self-Advocacy Movement has had a big impact. It works on problems that are the same as other civil rights groups. It also has problems that other groups don't. Most self-advocates don't drive or use public transportation. They need help getting to meetings.

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Self Advocacy Civil Rights Movement

The Self-Advocacy Movement believes that people with I/DD should make their own decisions. They want to be treated like everyone else in their communities. Self-advocacy groups teach people about their rights. Groups work together to change laws in their states. They work on closing institutions. They work on voting rights. They work on transportation. They work on how to get jobs. They work on being treated with respect.

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Most self-advocates depend on government benefits. It is hard for them to get money to go to big events. Self-advocacy groups use advisors to help them get and stay organized. It is hard to find advisors who know how to help people fight for their rights. Sometimes advisors speak over or instead of the members of the group.

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He got out of Beatrice State Home in 1974 and organized a self-advocacy group. He started “Project Two,” a group that worked on home and community-based services and self-advocacy.

The self-advocacy movement has worked hard on stopping members from being put into institutions. Ray Loomis was a self-advocate in Nebraska.

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Freedom and Independence

Self-advocates want the freedom to live independently. They want to have a say in how they receive services in the communities. They advocate for the closure of state-run institutions. They also fight for the same employment and housing settings as people without disabilities.

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People with I/DD had medical procedures without their consent. They were sterilized so they couldn't have children. The Virginia Eugenical Sterilization Act was repealed in 1979, but people with I/DD are still sterilized today.

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People with I/DD also have problems with voting. States passed laws that said they were not smart enough to vote. The self-advocacy movement works on voting projects to let people know about their voting rights.

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People with I/DD have problems with the police. Some police forced people with I/DD to confess to crimes they didn't do. People with I/DD died because the police hurt them when they had a problem in the community.

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Community services are part of health care services in the United States. The Self-Advocacy Movement works on getting more funding for services. It also works to fight laws that would change health care services.

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Meaningful Participation

People with I/DD have problems trying to be part of their communities. For example, they couldn't get library cards. They were kicked out of movie theaters. They want to work in regular jobs instead of sheltered workshops. They want to make their own decisions.

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The Self Advocacy Movement used the COURTS to fight discrimination

Self-Advocacy Movement groups have filed lawsuits, too. People First of Tennessee filed three lawsuits to close institutions in 1991 and 1994. People First of California and Washington joined lawsuits against institutions, too.

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The Self Advocacy Movement used the COURTS to fight discrimination

Two self-advocates named Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson filed a lawsuit to get out of a Georgia institution. The Supreme Court ruled in 1999 that they had the right to live in the community. This ruling was called the Olmstead decision. This decision has been used by other advocates to stop segregation.

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Self Advocates got laws PASSED to fight segregation!

The Self-Advocacy Movement used political activism to fight segregation. In Nebraska, a boy named Jonathan Allen lived in an institution. He had bruises that no one could explain. Members of Project 2 met with Senator Vard Johnson. He asked them to go with him on an unannounced tour of the institution. After that, the Senator changed his mind about institutions.

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As self-advocates have focused on voting and other civil rights. They spoke out about how the justice system treats people with disabilities. In 2015, self-advocates formed the Ethan Saylor Alliance for Self-Advocates as Educators. Ethan Saylor died when he was dealing with the police.

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Members of the self-advocacy movement worked hard to help pass the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A group of 475 people with disabilities went to Congress to protest delays in passing the ADA. They got out of their wheelchairs and crawled up the stairs. In 1990, 2,000 people with disabilities came to Washington to watch President Bush sign the ADA. The first Disability Pride Parade was in 1990.

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Marches, Protests, and Demonstrations

In June of 2017, Congress tried to pass a new bill that would cut Medicaid services. Members of ADAPT and other self-advocates went to Senator Mitch McConnell’s office to protest the bill. Sixty protesters attended the event and 43 people were arrested.

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