

Lindsey Beane p.2
Taylor Walroth p.3
Joshua Swaim p.4
Jenna Pierson p.5
Thomas Hughart p.6
Molly Abbott p.7
2017Entry Form p.10

THE IL EDGE
SPECIAL EDITION 2017 - WVSILC - PO Box 625 - Institute, WV 25112

2017 SPECIAL EDITION

2016 DISABILITY ESSAY CONTEST

The SILC is very pleased to share this Special Edition of our newsletter showcasing the winners of the 2016 Disability History Essay Contest. The contest began in the fall of 2016, corresponding to WV Disability History Week in October, and the awards were presented at high school Senior Awards Ceremonies in May 2017.

The theme for the contest this year was, "The Barriers for People with Disabilities in My Community and How I Can Make a Difference". This special edition of our newsletter includes all the winning essays, photos of the authors, information about their schools, and a bit of information to help you get to know these students. The authors of the winning essays received an engraved key chain and a check for the amount of their award as follows:



State Winner - \$3,000
Lindsey Grace Beane
Hurricane High School



District 1 - \$1,500
Taylor Morgan Walroth
Hurricane
High School



District 2 - \$1,500
Joshua Kyle Swaim
Robert C Byrd
High School



District 3 - \$1,500
Jenna Pierson
Parkersburg
High School



District 4 - \$1,500
Thomas Hughart
Nicholas County
High School



District 5 - \$1,500
Molly Abbott
Westside
High School

Congratulations to all the winners! I hope this contest continues to motivate high school seniors to not only submit an entry, but to learn more about disability history and how the disability rights movement has changed our world and our lives.

WV Centers for Independent Living

Appalachian CIL
Elk Office Center
4710 Chimney Dr.
Charleston, WV 25302
1-800-642-3003

Northern WV CIL
601-3 East Brockway Ave.
Morgantown, WV 26505
1-844-212-3464

109 Randolph Ave.
Elkins, WV 26241
304-636-0143

Mountain State CIL
821 Fourth Ave.
Huntington, WV 25701
1-866-687-8245

329 Prince St.
Beckley, WV 25801
304-255-0122

Continue Learning,

Ann McDaniel

Ann McDaniel
Executive Director

MISSION

"To ensure persons who have disabilities have access to community-based resources that promote personal choice and facilitate the achievement of their independent living goals."

Go Paperless: If you would prefer to receive our newsletter electronically, please contact us at (304) 766-4624 or wvsilc@wvsilc.org.



State Winner



Lindsey Grace Beane, a graduate of Hurricane High School, is active in her school and community through many clubs, organizations, pageantry and dance. She is an active participant of the National Honor Society, DECA club, Key club and founding member of the Students Against Destructive Decision Club (SADD).

When not studying, she enjoys spending her time promoting her platform; Defy Disability: Put People First, which has been a passion of hers. She has provided education both in state and out of state through pageantry through the years. She is the current reigning America's National Teenager which has allowed her to travel across the nation to spread awareness about.

She will be attending West Virginia University pursuing a degree in nursing.

Hurricane High School

Our Community:

Hurricane lies halfway between the cities of Huntington and Charleston. Families and businesses locate here because of the metropolitan proximity and clean suburban living. Our area has seen a 23% population growth since the year 2000.

Our School:

As the largest of four high schools in Putnam County, Hurricane High School is a public institution for grades 9 through 12 with 1,270 students and 75 classroom teachers. There are four administrators and four guidance counselors.

Our Graduates:

38% of students participate in the free or reduced lunch program. 78% of those graduating (260 students) intend to pursue a four-year degree program. 12% intend to pursue a two-year program at a community or technical college.

Lindsey Grace Beane

Hurricane High School

"The barriers for people with disabilities in my community and how I can make a difference."

Have you ever stopped and thought about what it would be like to not be able to walk? What would it be like to struggle to speak to others in everyday life or perform simple tasks? How would you feel if your family member struggled with a disability and your only wish was for other people to see them as you do – a happy, loving soul who is just like you and me?

I have a close friend named Anthony. As we spent time together, I would see others treat him differently. From subtle stares to blatant ridicule, I could see they saw him for his disability. They judged from a place of unknowing and fear, as their words and behavior revealed their hurtful thoughts. I wanted people to see Anthony like I see Anthony. He is my friend who still loves to watch Sponge Bob with me, because you are never really too old for Sponge Bob. Anthony always keeps a smile on your face with his humor and wit. You never know what he is going to say next, but Anthony always knows what to say. I saw the effect it had on him when people would stare because his walk is different or would make fun of him because he sometimes likes to rock back and forth. As much as it upset me to watch that happen to my friend, I know it hurt him more. I wanted to do something that would make a difference, not only for Anthony, but others in my community who have a disability. Anthony and my other friends who have been diagnosed with a physical or mental disability do not deserve to hear the words "crazy" and "psycho" in the hallways of my school. How could I make a difference in my community? I started my research around disability rights issues and found my passion. I could advocate for Anthony and others by encouraging my peers to treat everyone with respect.

Words are powerful; they can hurt and they often do. The language a society uses shapes their ideas and beliefs, so I learned the concept of "People First Language." People First Language is a method of communication that shows we see the person before their disability. For example, you would never use hurtful words such as "sped" or "crippled" and you would not say things like "that autistic boy." Instead you call the person by their name. You do not use the disability to describe the person. People First Language is the first step toward eliminating hurtful stereotypes and the devaluing of a person with a disability. Robert M. Hensel, disability advocate and Guinness World Record holder for the longest wheelchair wheelie, said, "There is no greater disability in society than the inability to see a person as more." This is why I believe the best way for me to knock down the barriers in my community is to fight the stigma of disability and to make sure we value everyone as individuals with gifts unique to each of us.

People with disabilities face stereotypes, prejudices, and injustices each and every day. For the past two years, I participated in Disability Awareness Day at the West Virginia State Legislature with a focus on promoting the use of People First Language. I was overjoyed when the West Virginia Legislature passed House Bill 2797 one of the items I advocated for on Disability Awareness Day. This bill changed all West Virginia law by removing the term "retarded" from state code. When the bill was signed into law on March 25, 2015, I knew I had made at least a small difference by educating my fellow West Virginians and spreading the importance of People First Language. When I returned as

(See Lindsey p8)

Taylor Morgan Walroth

Hurricane High School

The barriers for people with disabilities in my community and how I can make a difference.

The word disabilities is a word that holds a special place in my heart. This word is used in my everyday vocabulary when describing my brother to people who do not know him. Although I may start those conversations by using the word disabilities, it is only so that I can then quickly shed a positive light on those disabilities or limitations and highlight and focus on the 'abilities' part of the word. My older brother was born on May 1, 1991. He was diagnosed with Spina Bifida, Arnold Chiari, and Hydrocephalus at birth. These diagnoses led physicians to make the statement that he would only live to the age of two, would never smile or breathe on his own, and his cognitive skills would be severely impaired. These same doctors are the ones that refer to him as their "miracle boy". My brother is paralyzed from the waist down and is mobile via the use of his wheelchair. He has a tracheostomy, feeding tube, and breathes with the help of a ventilator. Throughout his life thus far he has had close to 60 surgeries. He has surpassed every milestone that has been put in his way. He has fought the battles dealing with his mind and bodily limitations. There are still battles and obstacles that he has not overcome yet because they are not in his control. He can't control that some places are not wheelchair accessible, businesses won't hire him because of his looks and limitations, or that people feel they can't communicate with him because of his disabilities.

Our country has made tremendous strides since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law in 1990. I personally cannot imagine how challenging it must have been for those with disabilities before then. By law, just to name a few, businesses and public places are to be handicapped accessible, service animals are to be allowed to enter public facilities and there are continuing improvements always being made to make things more accessible to be used by the hearing and sight impaired. Even though we have come a long way with the help of the ADA, there is always room for improvement, and I think that it was we as a society should always keep in mind.....IMPROVING!

My experiences with my brother and in the community we live in have been mostly positive, and even if they weren't, we as a family just keep positive and make the best of situations as they arise. In some ways, it is actually quite difficult for me to write an essay that would highlight possible negatives in my community or hardships that my family faces in raising my brother. Sticking to my statement that there is always room for improvement, I will say that even though most public facilities are wheelchair accessible to enter the building, sometimes the accessibility ends there. Once in the building, especially small grocery stores or department stores, wheelchairs are very hard to maneuver. Clothing racks are too close together, boxes are blocking aisles, check-out counters are too tall and so on. In my experiences with my classmates at school, classrooms have too many desks for the classmates in electric wheelchairs to maneuver and they are always bumping into things. I think this is so unfortunate because it draws attention to their disability and that is the last thing we would want to do. Some of these things are easy fixes and probably only need to be brought to a principal's attention at school, or a manager at a store, or the head of department store chain. I can and often do choose to be the voice that alerts someone of changes that need to be made in these areas. Currently there is no public park that is inclusive to

(See Taylor p9)

District 1 Winner



Taylor Morgan Walroth, a graduate of Hurricane High School took Advanced Placement and college level classes and was a member of National Honor Society, Student Council as Senior Class Publicity Chair, Link Crew, International Club, Chemistry Club, FSEA, Key Club, and DECA. She played on the Hurricane High School soccer (WVHSSCA All-State player in 2015), basketball, track (2014 and 2015 State Champions), and cross country teams. She is also a member of the WVFC U17 Girl's Travel Team and the 2016 West Virginia Olympic Development Program Soccer Team.

In her free time, Taylor loves spending time with her family, as they are the driving force behind all that she does. In the fall of 2017 Taylor will be attending West Virginia Wesleyan College to obtain a MSN from Wesleyan's nursing program and has committed to play on the Lady Bobcats' Soccer Team.

Hurricane High School

Our Community:

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District 2 Winner



Joshua Kyle Swaim, a 2017 graduate of Robert C. Byrd High School, was a four year member of the Flying Eagles Marching Band, Concert Band, and one year member of the Jazz Band. He served as President of the band his senior year. Along with band, he was a four year member of the Robert C. Byrd theatre department, earning the title of Prop Crew Chief. In addition, he was elected Class Treasurer three consecutive years, selected to serve as secretary of National Honor Society, and an Eagle Mentor to elementary students. Lastly, Kyle was nominated to attend Mountaineer Boys State. Kyle plans to attend Fairmont State University to double major in Accounting and Business Finance. Outside of school, Kyle enjoys spending time with friends and family and being active outdoors. Kyle would like to be an example that the only limits are the limits you put on yourself.

Robert C. Byrd High School

History:

On September 28, 1991 the citizens of Harrison County passed a bond that included funds for the construction of the new Robert C. Byrd High School. Ground was broke for this state of the art facility on August 28, 1992.

The dedication ceremony was conducted in the R.C.B.H.S. gymnasium on November 19, 1995. The Honorable Senator Robert C. Byrd was the featured speaker and honored guest. On December 10, 1995 and open house was held for the public to view this beautiful facility.

The first students passed through the doors to attend classes on January 4, 1996. Leon Pilewski became the first principal of R.C.B.H.S. and was assisted by Geary Rollins and William Fratto. Mr. Pilewski's chief goal was to continue the tradition of student academic excellence. This goal has become a reality through the accomplishments of the students, faculty, and staff of Robert C. Byrd High School.

Joshua Kyle Swaim

Robert C. Byrd High School

The Americans with Disabilities Acts were created and passed by Congress in the 1990s. Its goal was to stop the discrimination and oppression of people with disabilities through a successful series of laws that made public places accessible to Americans with disabilities. The history of the ADA, or commonly know as the Americans with Disabilities Acts began around 1988 when it was first introduced to Congress.

The point of these acts was to end the social barriers that excluded people with disabilities, by setting a standard level of accessibility for all public places. The early organizers of the ADA were the parents of children with disabilities who fought to end segregation, in not only their school but, also their communities. The ADA has changed many lives and will continue to do so in the numerous ways that this law helps protect and support those with disabilities.

The history of the ADA began after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement spurred the production of many different movements such as the Women's Rights Movement and the Disability Rights Movement. Congress passed legislation in the 1960s that protected minorities and women, but there was no protection for those with disabilities. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was broad in scope and covered those receiving federal funds, employ-ers, and places of public accommodation such as bus stations, restrooms, and lunch counters. (History of the ADA, 2016) This Act protected individuals from discrimination of race, religion, and national origin. Again, this act did not cover the basis of those with disabilities. Discrimination against those with disabilities was not addressed until 1973 when section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 became law, and later still in 1990 when the ADA was passed. (History of the ADA, 2016)

Being a student with a disability I can testify these regulations are not always followed. Many community buildings, schools and other places are not accessible to people with disabilities. Even today new buildings are not following these guidelines.

A large barrier for people with disabilities in my community is the lack of wheelchair accessible buildings, parks, and schools. The biggest way I plan to continue making strides in my community is to make the area schools more accessible. I have experienced first hand many levels of discrimination through the years while attending the state's public schools.

The first thing I would like to address is the level accessibility of the schools. My school was built in 1996 (well after the ADA was passed by Congress). It is sad that in 2016 I cannot get into my school by myself; my school does not have automatic doors, push button doors, or doors that are weighted to the ADA's guidelines at any of the entrances. This alone is a huge problem that needs to be addressed, and sadly, it only gets worse. Snow removal also seems to be a large issue at my school. I use a manual wheelchair so most snow I usually can just roll through without getting bogged down, but a former student at my school used significantly heavier power chair that would get bogged down. One day he was not able to get up the ramp because of the snow, and his parents complained to the administration. As my father was pushing me through the school, the custodian began to yell at my father and ask if he was the one with the problem. That crossed many lines and was a problem within it's self. Students that use wheelchairs should not be harassed

(See Joshua p8)

Jenna Pierson Parkersburg High School

Knocking Down Barriers

"The Barriers for people with disabilities in my community and how I can make a difference." When I reflect upon this topic, I think about how much progress we have made as a society since the passing of The Americans with Disabilities Act, or "ADA", of 1990. While we have taken strides in the right direction for equal accessibility, we still have much left to accomplish. We can look around our communities throughout the state and nation and see the impact of efforts that have been made to improve access: improvements at crosswalks and sidewalks, buses and cars with hydraulic lifts, and access to braille, visual aids, and audible signals for those who are blind and deaf. However, the majority of these wonderful accommodations are more largely prevalent in public institutions and spaces. Corporate institutions are also compliant with the ADA under federal law and its requirements. Upon further examination of my community, I have determined that there are many physical and attitudinal barriers that need to be addressed. Luckily, I have several ideas and solutions on how I can make a lasting impact.

Firstly, I feel as though I should immediately address physical barriers within my community and those it affects. Many existing physical barriers help to contribute to the high level of unemployment among the disabled. The societal cost of this high unemployment is immeasurable both financially and emotionally. Many small local businesses do not have the financial resources to provide the structure that may be needed to accommodate a disabled worker who desires to be employed. By lobbying both my local and national government, I can promote the proposition of tax incentives and federal grants to small and privately owned organizations to encourage the creation of accommodations for disabled employees. Secondly and equally important, access to affordable and appropriate housing needs to be easier for those who have a disability. In general, my community lacks competitively marketable housing that enables those with disabilities to be able to live independently at a price that isn't economically debilitating. By incentivising and encouraging home builders and resellers to upgrade new construction and existing housing through subsidies, we can create more accessibility in homes for those who are disabled. The first of many steps in this process that I could easily accomplish is communication with both local realtors and elected officials.

Stereotypes and social stigmas also pose major barriers to those who suffer from any form of disability, both physical and psychological. I speak firsthand as a person who has suffered from the stereotyping of disabilities. As an individual with Tourette's, I have been stigmatized many times in my life. Too often, society gets the idea that a disability can only manifest itself in one way, and the behavior may seem silly and laughable to them. However, disabilities like mine range in severity, and no matter how unmanageable they may seem to others, we are still able to participate in daily life and societal activity. Our differences should not marginalize us; we should be loved and accepted for who we are. To radically change these assumptions and views, we must aim to properly educate. By confronting my local Board of Education and challenging the current health class curriculum, which has little to no mention of how certain disabilities occur and what they mean, I can precipitate healthy and productive discussions with my peers and work towards eliminating stereotypes. Social Media is also a popular place in which stereotyping and bullying can occur. By

(See Jenna p9)

District 3 Winner



Jenna Pierson, a graduate of Parkersburg High School, will be studying Journalism and Political Science in college in the fall. She enjoys theatre, speech and debate, and writing for her school newspaper. In her free time, she enjoys travelling to new places and spending time with her family and dogs. She is honored to accept this award from the SILC and SRC, both of which are amazing organizations that have done wonderful things for the disabled community in our state. Together, we can continue to make strides in the right direction.

Parkersburg High School

Vision:

Parkersburg High School will provide a challenging educational environment where diverse talents, ideas, and abilities of students can be developed to their fullest potential.

Mission:

As a community of educators at Parkersburg High School, we will create a challenging and diverse educational environment in which all students will master the curriculum, skills, and behaviors necessary to be productive citizens.

Alma Mater:

O PHS, to you sing praise, And songs to Alma Mater raise,
While we strive to keep thy name, Forever in the halls of fame,
Mountains fair and valleys bright, Renew the path for banners bright,
Times of joy or times of stress, We'll always love you, PHS.



District 4 Winner



Thomas Hughart, a graduate of Nicholas County High School, where he was a member of the National Honor Society, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and YoungLife. He is a black belt in Kung Fu and has been a volunteer martial arts instructor at the Summersville Youth Center since the 9th grade. He lives in the small town of Birch River and is a member of the Birch River Baptist Church. He plans to enroll in college in the Fall of 2017, although he is still undecided about which college to attend. He plans to major in Chemistry/Pre-Med and eventually become a pediatrician. In his spare time, He enjoys playing the guitar and cello, and has been employed at the Summersville Wendy's for almost two years.

Nicholas County High School

Nicholas County High School Strives To:

Foster the knowledge and skills taught across our curriculum

Empower students to participate as educated, experienced members of our society

Enable students to work towards the achievement of their post-high school educational and career goals.

NCHS accomplishments:

Placed 16th in the WVSSAC Football Tournament in 2007, 12th place in 2008, 8th place in 2009, and 9th place in 2012.

Placed 8th in the WVSSAC Cheerleading Tournament in 2007.

NCHS placed 12th in the world Future Problem Solvers Team.

NCHS also has two first place titles and one second place title at the 2013 West Virginia FBLA Conference.

Thomas Hughart

Nicholas County High School

The Barriers for People with Disabilities in My Community and How I Can Make a Difference

On July 29, 2014, my life changed. I was 15 years old and my life was consumed with martial arts, weight-lifting, guitar, video games and friends. I had planned to try out for the football team that coming school year, so I was trying to get in shape and my body was in the best shape it had ever been. People even told me that I had bigger "guns" than my Dad—and I was proud of that. I didn't have time to worry about the fact that so many people around me are unable to enjoy the things that my friends and I enjoy and take for granted. On that hot summer day, I had a friend over and we decided to ignore my Dad's directive to stay off of the side-by-side (UTV). My friend wanted to ride it, so I let him drive. We took it down the road and my friend showed me his donut skills, which turned out to be less than perfect because the side-by-side rolled over on us. We had worn our seatbelts, but on instinct, I reached my hand out to catch myself just as the machine was about to hit the ground. The roll-bar landed on my dominant hand, crushing the bones and tearing my flesh as it scooted across the pavement with my hand and arm between the machine and the ground. I was in pain and scared. My whole arm was burning but numb at the same time. I was immediately scared that I'd never be able to use my hand again. How would I ever be able to play the guitar, lift weights, play football or do martial arts with my Dad? He had been in martial arts since he was three years old and had recently become a Master of Kung Fu. He was looking forward to my following in his footsteps. But now I couldn't even make a fist. School was about to start and I couldn't even use my hand to write. At that moment, I decided that I didn't want a future without martial arts or any of the other things I enjoyed. I decided that I would work hard to recover. It took surgery, stitches and seven pins in the bones of my hand to reconstruct it and that was followed by eight weeks of physical therapy. My surgeon didn't even know if I would regain full use of my hand. For about 5 months I was unable to use it, but I have now fully recovered. I realize how fortunate I was to be able to overcome what could have disabled me. There are many people who have been dealt a different hand in life—either from birth or from an accident or other situation—and they don't have the option of recovery in the way that I did. They face barriers that prevent them from enjoying things that most of us take for granted.

In my community, the ball fields, parks and stadiums are well-equipped with wheelchair ramps and handrails to allow people with disabilities to be spectators, but what about participation in sports and other physical activities? The local fitness center could probably accommodate wheelchairs on the inside, but the ground from the parking lot to the front door is graveled. My friends and I visit each other frequently, but when I look at my home and my friends' homes, I realize that we all have several steps to our front doors. How could a friend in a wheelchair get inside?

Once we become aware of all of the physical barriers that people with disabilities face, we can work to remove them. But there are other barriers that aren't as easy to identify and remove. There are stereotypes and attitudes that many of us harbor and may not even realize that we do. We may avoid contact because we don't know what to say or how to act. We may pass a person on

Molly Abbott

Westside High School

The difficulties that people with disabilities in my community face are many and always a hardship. Accessibility and actual obstacles abound throughout every establishment. As an individual, there are ways to assist people in the community and many ways that I can help to raise awareness of the need for better access for the handicapped.

While assisting with my grandmother, who in her later years required a wheelchair, I came to understand and appreciate the difficulties people with disabilities face in everyday life. Simple tasks become great hardships for many. My community lacks in access to many establishments simply because the sidewalks are cracked and crumbled in many areas. Many people may see a small patch of broken sidewalk and not think this is a big deal. When someone in a wheelchair is trying to navigate these areas it can be impossible. People who are pushing the wheelchair find that the wheels do not want to roll and the wheelchair can actually tilt and dump the individual from their seat.

Many of the older buildings have "small" step ups that are a great deterrent to anyone requiring a wheelchair or even a walker. Just a few weeks ago, I witnessed an elderly lady with a walker stepping up to enter a beauty salon with great difficulty. This lady was being assisted by a young woman but this step was a great obstacle for these ladies and the potential for a fall frightened me to even think about.

Many businesses are not even set up to allow access to individuals with disabilities. One business in particular has their seating arrangement in such a way that patients must vacate their seats and assist the disabled person by moving the waiting room furniture around to make room for wheelchairs or walkers. This is a great burden and many times an embarrassment for many disabled individuals. While I have witnessed and even assisted with the movement of this furniture the person requiring the assistance was understandably upset. Some of the other patients were disabled in some way and also found it difficult to be standing and walking or moving their walkers/canes while these adjustments were made. And once completed and the furniture put back into place, the rearranging had to be done yet again once the individual needed to leave this office. Many stores have aisles that are usually blocked by merchandise and inaccessible to disabled individuals and ones who are not disabled alike, posing problems not only with access to merchandise but also has potential for injuries to individuals attempting to reach everyday items they may require.

Individuals with disabilities such as hearing impairments, speech, or visual impairments face even greater obstacles at times. Not only do these individuals face the same crumbled and deteriorated sidewalk issues, they also have few if any assistance with simple activities such as grocery shopping and banking. Crossing the street where there are no cross walks is a nightmare and life threatening for individuals with visual impairments. Living in a rural community with few resources poses many obstacles for disabled individuals. Access to assistance with sign language and braille is very limited in my community.

As an individual, I can assist people as I see the need arise when I am out in the community. I can also attend Town Council meetings and express my concerns and encourage updates and community awareness for challenges faced by the disabled people in our community. I could write to our elected

(See Molly p9)

District 5 Winner



Molly Abbott, a graduate of Westside High School, a National Honor Society Member, and a member of the CoEd Hi-Y Club. Molly's name has consistently been listed in the Honor Roll as well as several mentions on the Brain Trust list. During her junior year, Molly represented WHS as a member of the Tennis Team.

Outside of school, Molly is active in her church and community. She is a yearly volunteer in the summer youth Bible School activities at Russell Missionary Baptist Church, where she is a member. Molly is an avid reader, whose hobbies include hunting, and spending time with family and friends. She is also devoted to her many pets, including her best friend, Stella (the cat).

Molly has recently been accepted into the Surgical Technology Program at Southern WV Community & Technical College. Molly is very excited to begin the next chapter in her life and looks forward to the many rewards and challenges of the future.

Westside High School

The original Westside High School was located in the western section of the city at the corner of Southwood and Franklin Streets. The school was officially opened in September 1951 as Reed Street High School and was built for black high school students. The first principal was B.M. Wakefield.

In 1970, all schools in the United States were integrated and in the fall of 1971, the present facility was occupied. Mr. Henry Adair became the second principal of Westside High School in 1983. In the Fall of 2014, Mr. Kory Roberts took the helm as only the third Principal Westside High School has seen.



(Joshua continued from p4)

for complaining that the ramps are blocked with snow.

Continuing to the inside of the building my school has the main gym which is used as the bus room and for gym class, but we have an auxiliary gym that is used when the main gym is being taken up. Currently there is no way for a person using a wheelchair to get into that gym. No elevator, no stair lift, nothing. This again is not in cooperation with guidelines set by the ADA. This is a prime example that shows blatant disregard for people with disabilities. If schools do not follow federal regulations, how are other places expected to follow the same laws? It's sickening that in a country with so many freedoms, people are discriminated against because of something that is out of their control.

Luckily my county has a large fleet of lift equipped buses, but lack of maintenance and driver training makes riding these buses a chore. Often times the drivers have no idea how to operate the lift, requiring myself to walk them through how it works. This is a huge problem that needs to be addressed. Another transportation problem that needs to be addressed is bus driver and bus aid attitudes towards people who use wheelchairs. I have had aids and drivers who automatically assume I have an intellectual impairment because I use a wheelchair when that is not the case.

The final problem I would like to address is the issue of parents and guardians parking in and blocking the handicap spots at the beginning and end of the school day. My school is fortunate enough to have an abundance of handicapped parking spots, but they are blocked and taken by people who do not need them. My school's administration has been notified many times, but no changes or tickets have been issued. Once again, this shows no concern for people with disabilities, whether students or guests to the school.

The first way I plan on making a difference in my community is writing this essay. With it, I hope to shine light on a form of discrimination that most citizens don't think about. While writing about these flaws I hope to create changes in not only my school, but my county, and my state as well. I would like to serve as a spokesperson for students with disabilities and eventually be able to meet with state

(See Joshua p9)

(Lindsey continued from p2)

a student advocate for the 2016 Disability Awareness Day, I set my table up just outside the Senate chambers to access as many lawmakers as possible. I focused on advocating for adding a requirement to state code that People First Language be taught in West Virginia schools as a part of Disability Awareness Week. I was able to provide lawmakers and everyone I spoke to with an awareness wristband that promotes People First Language with the slogan, "Defy Disability: Put People First."

I believe it is crucially important to educate both my peers and elementary age children about the importance of People First Language. The greatest strides for change often occur when children learn belief systems that respect and include everyone. I have had the opportunity to go into elementary and middle school classrooms to teach students about People First Language and the importance of putting the person before the disability. I was fortunate to request and receive interactive brochures from the Developmental Disabilities Council that promote the use of People First Language to hand out in my community. When those were depleted, I developed my own interactive presentation about the use of People First Language that definitely kept the interest of the classroom. As I left, I always gave every student one of the, "Defy Disability: Put People First," awareness wristbands. I have discovered that these wristbands are very effective in not only promoting people first language, but also provide the opportunity for continued education about People First Language. I have distributed over 1000 wristbands while promoting the use of People First Language and know that they have led to conversations with those who see them.

My wish is for our culture to progress with the understanding that people have exceptionalities, not disabilities. As I go to college next year, I want to continue learning about the struggles that people living with disabilities face so that I can continue to advocate for kids like Anthony. Everyone has gifts to offer, and we have to look past the labels set by society and promote everyone's abilities, putting people first. ■

(Thomas continued from p6)

the street or in the hallway and not even acknowledge them. Maybe it's the result of a fear of that which is different, but that is an irrational fear.

If we spend more time with people who have disabilities and get to know them, we will begin to see more than just the body that might not look or function like our own. We can donate our time and money to raise awareness about any physical barriers that might still remain and to combat the negative stereotypes and attitudes. We can also take advantage of social media. It is free and far-reaching. We can share stories and information on social media to help others who may not realize the plight of people with disabilities or may not realize that they could be contributing to the barriers that many people face. There is a fairly new reality-TV show on A&E, called "Born This Way," that features people with disabilities, and gives viewers a peek into their lives. Shows like this help tear down attitudinal barriers. We can demand more shows like it.

If I had lost my arm in that accident two years ago, I would likely have faced challenges as a disabled person. While I wouldn't want to go through it again, I'm thankful that I had the experience. It has given me the desire to do my part to improve the quality of life for others, wherever possible. The scars on my hand are a permanent reminder for me to continue striving to remove those barriers. ■

(Taylor continued from p3)

those with disabilities in my community, but there is one in the works which is extremely exciting for young kids with physical limitations in my hometown. This is long overdue, but I choose to see the bright side and the positive that my community will soon have an all-inclusive park. Sharing the news of this park, going to the Parks and Recreation Commission and giving them input from personal experience with my brother and advocating for similar parks in surrounding counties should be something I get involved in that will make a difference. Personally I think that education is the key to improving any and all situations! If we start educating at a young age and teach children that those with disabilities are just like them in many ways, then I think kids start to see the "abilities" in the disabilities. This education needs to take place in the school system, in our homes, and in the communities we live in. Inclusion in the school system has helped tremendously. Special Olympics is one of my most favorite activities to be involved in as a student and so many bonds and friendships are made between typical students and special needs students. So much education takes place on a social level at Special Olympics. Communication barriers sometimes present a problem, and where verbal communication isn't possible, basic sign language is helpful. I truly believe that American Sign Language should be a class in the school system just like any other foreign language class that is offered. This would help so many students build closer relationships with those with communication deficits, and once again, if the educating starts at a young age then the focus becomes more on the abilities that we all have in breaking down barriers.

My parents, have always said "when you know better, you do better!" I feel that if I have done anything to personally make a difference in my community, it is that I actually live everything about this essay topic. This is my life, my brother's struggle, my family's truth. I stay positive and educate those around me. I see things that my peers may not see, or I communicate with those with disabilities without even stopping to think about it. I go up to moms at the mall they may have a child in a wheelchair or a child on the autism spectrum and talk to them and ask about their child. I tell them about my brother and all the wonderful accomplishments he has had that doctors said he never would. Inspiring others by being positive and sharing our family's story is educating and breaking down the negative connotation that people have towards those that are different than them. My goal is to make people know better! Do better! Be better at including the disabled living in our communities. ■

(Molly continued from p7)

officials and ask for assistance for my community for the disabled citizens. I believe that simply making a noise and bringing these issues to peoples' attention could possibly help to resolve some of these issues. Some of the obstacles faced may require greater effort to see improvement and financial assistance for my town would be required.

The barriers in my community for the disabled can create hardships and act as deterrents for many needing to go out into the community. The inaccessibility of many buildings and businesses can actually be potentially harmful to many. There are many ways to improve our community, but raising awareness could help greatly. As individuals, there are many ways we can assist others, but as a community we could exponentially increase accessibility for all of the disabled citizens of our community. All of these barriers faced by disabled individuals in my community can and should be overcome. Improvements are a must! ■

(Jenna continued from p5)

taking a stand and helping others understand a different point of view, I can use this powerful outlet for good.

While some of this may seem major, even the largest movements for change started with small groups of people. All you really need to achieve is a dream and a drive. These actions will further advance my community towards equality for the disabled, and will hopefully increase their quality of life as well. Hopefully, the difference I can create will echo into other communities, and our state and country can find itself with a deeper love and understanding for the whole human race. ■

(Joshua continued from p8)

a spokesperson for students with disabilities and eventually be able to meet with state education leaders to solve the social barriers that students with disabilities like myself and many others face everyday. ■

2017 Disability History Essay Contest

The 2017 Disability History Essay Contest will be held this fall to compliment Disability History Week October, 16 - 20, 2017.

This contest gives WV High School Seniors an opportunity to showcase their writing skills, share their knowledge of the Disability Rights Movement and perhaps earn some money to help advance their future!

The contest is a collaborative effort of the Statewide Independent Living Council and the State Rehabilitation Council, supported by a generous grant from the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services, with cooperation from the Department of Education and the Department of Education and the Arts. The winning essays and their authors are recognized and presented with a check each year at the Senior Awards Ceremony at their respective high schools.

Watch for information at your school and keep checking www.wvsilc.org.



2017 Disability History Essay Contest



Dear West Virginia High School Seniors:

The Disability History Contest Committee is proud to announce the 2017 Disability History Essay Contest in West Virginia! This contest is designed to provide you with an opportunity to showcase your writing skills, share what you have learned about the Disability Rights Movement, use your ability to form and express opinions, and perhaps to earn some money to help you into your future! **All high school seniors** are invited to submit an entry. Contest rules are located on the bottom of the included entry form – be sure to **read them carefully** and follow ALL the rules.

All entries must include the completed entry form and must comply with all contest rules. Points will be deducted for any failure to follow the rules, including failure to use “people first language.” While federal law prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, we still face barriers every day. The development of new technology has reduced or eliminated many barriers and people with disabilities are eager access it, when cost is not a barrier. New and promising breakthroughs in technology, including robotics, continue to attack barriers in medical care, sports, indoor/outdoor recreation, mobility, and daily living. The essay topic this year is:

“How technology has removed barriers and improved the lives of people with disabilities.”

The top award will be presented to the state winner, and awards may be presented to first-place and second-place entries from six Districts of our state. The awards are as follows:

State Winner.....	\$3,000
District First Place (6)	\$1,500
District Second Place (6).....	\$750

Funding for all awards is provided through a generous grant from the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services.

All entries must be postmarked, faxed, or emailed by **October 31, 2017** and be submitted to:

WV Statewide Independent Living Council

PO Box 625

Institute, WV 25112-0625

ATTN: Essay Contest

or

E-mail: kathi.young@wvsilc.org

Fax: 304-766-4721

This contest is a collaborative effort of the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Statewide Independent Living Council and the State Rehabilitation Council, with cooperation from the WV Department of Education and the WV Department of Education and the Arts in recognition of WV Disability History Week.



2017 Disability History Essay Contest Entry Form



Name:	Address:			Parent/Guardian Permission: (Required if you are under 18 or have a legal guardian) I give my permission for my child/ward to participate in this contest and to accept an award if selected:
Birth Date:	Age:	City:		
E-Mail:	State:	Zip:		
Phone #:	County:			
Contestant Signature:	Parent/Guardian Signature:			
Media Release:		Date:		Relationship to Contestant:

Media Release:

My signature above as contestant and/or parent/guardian constitutes my permission for the sponsors to use photos of me/my child/ward for public relations purposes as they see fit.

Official Topic: "How technology has removed barriers and improved the lives of people with disabilities."

Essay Contest Rules:

- Each contestant must be given the entry form and complete rules which include information about the contest, judging, and awards.
- The Disability History Essay Contest is open only to High School Seniors in West Virginia.
- The Contest is statewide and entries may be from any county and will be sorted into 6 (six) Districts following the districts delineated by the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services.
- Contestants must compose an original essay, with limited assistance from others (which may include typing). An essay is an analytical or interpretive literary composition. Works of fiction or poetry will not be accepted.
- The panel of judges reserves the right to give fewer or no awards at its sole discretion.
- Each contestant may submit only one essay. Multiple essays from a single contestant will be disqualified.
- Contestants must write on the official topic.
- Each entry must have a title page including: the official topic; contestant's name, address, phone number, date of birth; and name of school.

- Essays must be typed in 12 pt. font, double-spaced, and have no more than 4 pages of content.
- Pages must have page numbers centered at the bottom of each page (excluding the Title Page).
- Essays must include factual information as well as the observations and opinions of the Contestant.
- Any quotations or copyrighted material must be properly referenced.** Failure to reference non-original material will result in disqualification.
- No reference can be made in the essay identifying the student, parents, school, or community.**
- The essay must be written in English using "People First Language".
- The entry must be stapled in the upper left corner. Covers of any type are not accepted.
- As a reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities, entries may be submitted as audio-recordings. Such entries will be subject to all word limits and format requirements.

Judging:

- Essays will be numbered to conceal writer identity.
- Judging will be completed by an assigned panel.

- Only judges can assign a penalty or award points.

Scoring Areas & Points Available:

- Content: logical interpretation of the subject and adherence to the topic – **40**
- Vocabulary & Style: phrasing and continuity – **30**
- Grammar, Punctuation, & Spelling – **20**
- Neatness – **5**
- Adherence to Contest Rule and in proper format – **5**
- Points will be deducted for rules violations**

Awards:

State Winner - \$3,000
District Winners (6) - \$1,500 each
District Runners Up (6) - \$750 each

Submit Entry by October 31, 2017 to:

Mail: WV Statewide Independent Living Council
PO Box 625
Institute, WV 25112-0625
ATTN: Essay Contest
Fax: 304-766-4721
E-mail: kathi.young@wvsilc.org

WVSILC
P.O. Box 625
Institute, WV 25112-0625

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