

SPECIAL EDITION

2023 DISABILITY HISTORY ESSAY CONTEST

The SILC is very pleased to share this Special Edition of the IL Edge showcasing the winners of the 2023 Disability History Essay Contest. The contest reinforces WV Disability History Week held the third week of October.

The theme for the Disability History Essay Contest this year was, "Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future."

Awards were presented at High School Senior Awards Ceremonies across the State by the WV Division of Rehabilitation Service's (WVDRS) District Counselors, and the West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council (WVSILC) Board Members and Staff. 2023 marked the first time in the Essay Contest's history that every district had a first and second place winner, which speaks of the quality of the essays received this year.

This special edition of our newsletter includes all the winning essays, photos of the authors, and a bit of information to help you get to know these students. In addition to the award certificate, the authors of the winning essays received an engraved personalized key chain and a check for the amount of their award as follows:

State Winner - \$3,250
District 1st Place Winners - \$1,750
District 2nd Place Winners - \$1000

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.

From the Desk of,



Jerry Boyko
Executive Director

2023 Disability History Essay Contest

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 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 local schools. The winning essays and their authors are recognized and presented with a check generally at the Senior Awards Ceremony at their respective high schools.

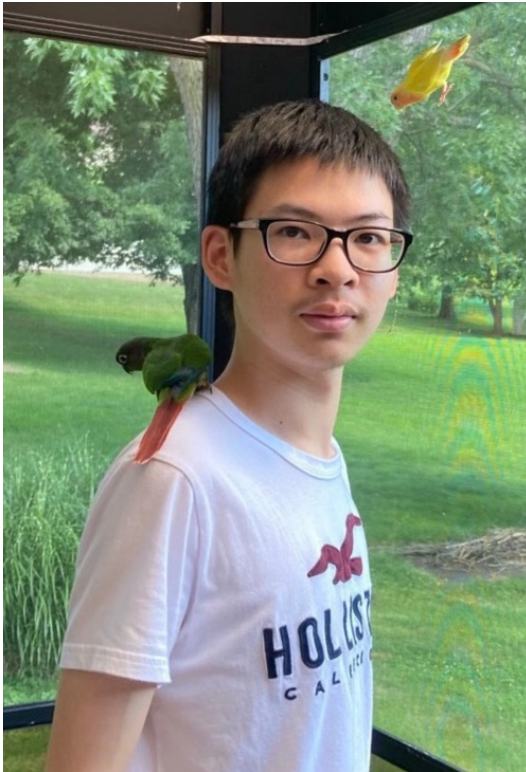
MISSION

"The mission of the WVSILC is to promote the value, equality, full-inclusion, and freedom of choice of all West Virginians with disabilities."





State Winner



Lingjian Zheng is a senior at Parkersburg High School. He started his high school career at Parkersburg South High School with English as his second language. He was an active member of the National Honor Society and the STARS community service group. He competed in Math Field Day and was recognized as a regional and state winner. As an active member of the National Honor Society, he assisted the American Red Cross with its blood drive

Mr. Zheng plans to attend WVU in the fall and major in biology. His aim is to expand the border of science through his future involvement in frontier research. ■



Lingjian Zheng

Parkersburg South High School

“Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future”

Kailash Satyarthi once said: “the power of youth is the common wealth for the entire world. The faces of young people are the faces of our past, our present and our future.” From Stephen Hawking’s Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and his magnificent academic achievements, to Steve Jobs’ dyslexia and his splendid technological innovations, it can be concluded that people who are regarded as having physical or mental impairments have their own unique strengths, capabilities, and talents like everyone else does. Therefore, they are quite capable of making good endeavors and succeeding in their career. Likewise, youths with disabilities are equal to their peers without impairments, and they together represent the faces of our entire world. However, people from the past might not recognize things in this way.

From the 1840s to the 1960s, “freak shows” and circuses were popular in America. Because people with disabilities had difficulties in getting work skills and finding jobs, these were sometimes the only job options people with disabilities had to choose from. To improve their harsh living conditions, they had to do such work to entertain those without a disability by exploiting their dignity and physical differences. By that time, discrimination against people with disabilities had lived in many people’s minds for a long time. Despite that, figures of people with disabilities were seen at work in every field of society (“Work”).

Things remained unchanged until the disability rights movement interrupted the dead silence. Numerous organizations and groups by and for people with disabilities exploded in popularity in the 1900s, such as the League of the Physically Handicapped, the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, ADAPT (Americans Disabled for Accessible Public Transportation, later changed to Americans Disabled Attendant Programs Today), etc. With their protests and continuous efforts for years, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 finally became the law after being signed by President Carter in 1977, symbolizing the initial victory in addressing disability discrimination. In addition, more legislations were passed by the U.S. (United States) Congress after that. As the disability rights movement heated up, the greatest storm came in 1990. Protesters gathered in front of the United States Capitol building where the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) had stalled due to the lobbying efforts of public transit companies. Among the protesters, a group of disability activists, who were also individuals with disabilities, “tossed aside their wheelchairs, walkers, and crutches and ascended the steps (Meldon).” By dragging themselves up the stairs, they demonstrated their daily struggles and their imperative need for accessibility. Their feat, known as the “Capitol Crawl,” shocked the country, left its mark on history, and most importantly, lit the life of every American with disabilities. The ADA was eventually passed by the Congress in July of 1990 and signed by the President. It was the most comprehensive disability rights legislation in history, according to U.S. Department of Labor: “Its employment provisions prohibit discrimination in job application procedures, hiring, advancement, termination, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.” Such great legal achievement crushed all the unfairness and discrimination hidden in the career paths of youth with disabilities, offering them massive new

Emma Looney

Roane County High School

“Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future.”

Could you imagine being born a little differently than others, and being treated unfairly for it? Until I began researching the Disability Rights Movement, I was unaware of the challenges being faced by people with disabilities. This essay begins by discussing the word “disability”. It then describes the discrimination and the legal action towards progress in the disability rights movement. Finally, it explores the challenges and triumphs of career paths for youth with disabilities and the support groups that are available.

People with disabilities face several challenges in their daily lives. Some have physical disabilities, while other have mental disabilities. Some of these disabilities are able to be seen, while others are invisible.

A disability is a condition, mental or physical, that prevents a person from hearing, moving, seeing, speaking, learning or living like others. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. In the past, many people didn’t understand the causes of disabilities. People with disabilities were feared or misunderstood.

Children who were born with disabilities were not always cared for and forced to live away from their families. This discrimination led to mistreatment and abuse. In the 1930s and 1940s, people with disabilities were some of the first to be harmed or killed when the Nazi party came to power in Germany. (Hayes).

Over time, people with disabilities and their families began to speak out against the discrimination. Most of the legal action towards progress in the disability rights movement began in the late 1900s. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was a very important piece of legislation for the

Disability Rights Movement. Section 504 stated that no federally funded program could discriminate against people with disabilities. It stated that these programs must meet the reasonable needs of people with disabilities, which was especially important for students with disabilities. Under this law, public schools had to meet the educational needs of all students with disabilities. (Hayes).

One of the major challenges for children with disabilities was access to education. When the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975, all children finally had a right to equal education. In 1990, this legislation was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It gave parents more rights when deciding what type of education their children should receive. (Temple).

Americans with disabilities celebrated a huge success in 1990 when the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) became law. The ADA is a federal law that ensures businesses and agencies provide accommodations so people with disabilities have equal opportunities for jobs and equal access to public spaces and services. (Hayes)

About 17% of people with disabilities never finish high school and less than

(See Looney p16)

District 1 First Place



Emma Looney is a senior at Roane County High School and took college courses through West Virginia University at Parkersburg. During her high school career, she was on the principal’s Honor Roll every year.

She has been actively involved in Future Farmers of America (FFA) all four years of high school, and currently serves as the Chapter Vice President. She is a member of 4-H, National Honor Society, Take It from Us (TIFU), and the Vice President of Roane County 4-H Junior Leaders.

Emma has volunteered to work as a large animal vet assistant. She also has a hoof-trimming business where she travels to farms to trim goat hooves.

After she graduate Emma plans to attend Carver Career and Technical Education Center to work on an associate degree in their vet tech program. ■





District 1 Second Place



Madison Smith is a senior at Sissionville High School. She graduated with honors with a 4.0 GPA and an allocation of 14 college credits. She took honors classes throughout her high school career. She is an NJHS (National Junior Honor Society) member.

Her goal is to attend a college in the field of business management or analytic. She hopes to become a realtor one day and work her way into becoming a broker and owning her own brokerage firm in the future.

Ms. Smith has volunteered at shelters for community service. In her spare time, she enjoys painting, loves playing games like sudoku and zombies, and plays volleyball when she can. ■



Madison Smith Sissionville High School

“How the Past Built the Future”

Robert. M Hensel once stated, “There is no greater disability in society than the inability to see a person as more.” Youth with disabilities have not only been underestimated, but also undermined and neglected in the workforce for centuries. The laws and limitations set on the disability community was oppressive, which made it nearly impossible to maintain sustaining and satisfying pay. With justified retaliation and protest throughout the years, laws and acts were passed to ensure equality and respect within the work environment. Even though youth with disabilities still do not have the same access as their coworkers without a disability, there are currently a variety of careers available. Now the next question, “What future career opportunities lie ahead for youth with disabilities? How have the events in the past shaped the present and will shape the future?”

In the past, careers were nearly non-existent. It was not until the 20th century, more specifically the end of World War II, that people with disabilities stopped being tortured – much less receive a job. For example, during Adolf Hitler’s reign, he ordered a secret medical order meant to euthanize people with disabilities due to their “impurity and hindrance” to his reign and the workforce [1]. This horrifying mistreatment was not just subjected to Germany. The employees of Willowbrook State School in New York were secretly documented and caught physically abusing and neglecting children in 1935. Many were beaten – one woman even killed. If not beaten, children and adults were neglected and even forced to sit in their own waste [2]. It wasn’t until 1975 – forty years later – that the residents of the school were moved into small homes. It took forty years of abuse for something to happen.

The retaliation to decades of suffering, abuse, and rejection in the workforce was equivalent to whiplash. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) allocated The League for the Physically Handicapped in New York City in 1935 to combat discrimination against disabilities in both the workplace and society. Members held a sit in for nine days at the Home Relief Bureau and a weekend at WPA headquarters, which created 1,500 more available jobs for people with disabilities [3]. Paul Strachan founded the The American Federation of the Physically Handicapped in 1940 , which was the first cross-disability organization that pushed for an end to job discrimination. They even called for “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week” (later held in 1947 in D.C).

The week dedicated was created into a permanent organization named the President’s Committee on Employment of the Physically Handicapped in 1953, but later excluded “Physically” in 1962 in order to include people with cognitive disabilities [3]. Skipping ahead some odd years , the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination against race, gender, nationality, and ethnicity. However, it didn’t seem to apply heavy to disabilities. People with disabilities were still faced with problems like less jobs and even inaccessible public transportation, which sparked the 504 sit-in of 1973 [4].

One of the most imperative acts passed for youths with disabilities is The American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Passed in 1990, the ADA was shaped by The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 [3][5]. It provided full civil rights and protection of those rights for people with

(See Smith p15)

Gabriella Selders Morgantown High School

Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future

Throughout the years, youth with disabilities have fought tirelessly for their right to work and access equal paths to employment, from grappling against career discrimination themselves to paving the way for others' ability to be hired without any form of discrimination against them. Youth with disabilities wish to be seen in the workplace and continue to progress toward equality.

The past has been unkind to youth with disabilities regarding career pathways and treatment. Prior to 1972, state institutions housed individuals with disabilities in restrictive settings, and many families could not afford planning, placement decisions, or the ability for the individual to stay at home. Education was even harder; schools were allowed to deny children with any disability, ranging from visual impairment to developmental disabilities, from attending school. Lacking access to education is a non-starter in terms of employment, so the United States came to address the issue in *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* in 1972. The landmark court decision would place responsibility on the states and localities to educate children with disabilities. This case opened a doorway to possibility, as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) would be passed in 1975 to support states and localities in protecting the rights of, meeting the individual needs of, and improving the results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities and their families (A History of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act). National goals would be met with the new program as amendments would be added to IDEA throughout the years to address other issues affecting youth with disabilities, including employment. An important factor in youth with disabilities seeking career paths is transition services to assist the process of leaving high school to pursue a career or postsecondary education. Another landmark court decision in *Endrew F v. Douglas County School District Re-1* emphasized that schools also must provide an Individualized Education Plan, IEP, reasonably calculated to allow a child to make progress appropriate to the child's circumstances. An IEP is crucial in the transition from high school to a career as it plans for appropriate employment and living objectives, suggests appropriate community agencies, and connects students with disabilities to community resources (Employment Considerations for Youth With Disabilities). With the additional push of the Disability Rights Movement in the 1980s, Public Law 98-527 and Public Law 100-146 would be passed to acknowledge goals and promote employment opportunities for anyone with disabilities. Though the past created many obstacles, youth with disabilities could push forward to access the education needed to hold a job. In the 2020-21 school year, more than 66% of children with disabilities were in general education classrooms for 80% or more of their school day (IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection). Nearly 7.5 million children with disabilities have been given services to meet their individual needs in the same school year.

Even with these advances, research still shows that those with disabilities are less likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and become employed. Thankfully, the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth created a guidepost to a successful transition out of high school; there needs to be more high-quality education, more opportunities to develop world skills, connections with supportive adults, and access to services are all required

District 2 First Place



Gabriella Selders is a senior at Morgantown High School. Her high school career includes being on Morgantown High School's tennis team and president of the writers' club.

She volunteers at Cheat Lake Public Library writing book reviews and arranging book displays to inspire more children to read.

Her goal is to become someone who can assist her community such as a doctor or lawyer. She is certain that she will continue to write for the rest of her life.

She enjoys baking new recipes, writing short stories and essays, buying books, dinosaurs, museums, and exploring new experiences.

Gabriella is thankful to everyone who supported her projects. She believes she would not be where she is today without them. ■





District 2 Second Place



David Brannon is a senior at Gilmer County High School. He maintained a GPA of 4.0 or greater throughout his high school years. During his high school career, he was Senior Class President, Mu Alpha Theta President, National Honor Society President, Student Council Representative, and a member of 4-H and FFA. Mr. Brannon took honors and dual credit classes throughout his high school years. As a result of his accomplishment, he was awarded the National Rural and Small Town Recognition Award by the College Board. Over the course of his high school career, he participated in a variety of community service activities.

David intends to pursue a degree in business or accounting at West Virginia University. ■



David Brannon Gilmer County High School

Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future

Laws do not change behavior, but enforcement does. Without protections, employment opportunities for disabled youth would be limited, and in some cases eliminated. One significant piece of legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Act, prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in many sectors of life, including employment. Enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act has opened opportunities for disabled youth across the United States.

Before the ADA was passed in 1990, disabled Americans faced employment discrimination based solely on their disability (“Review laws, regulations & standards,” n.d.). In office, and corporate settings, disabled Americans were often denied high level positions within companies. Even if they managed to move up the corporate ladder, they hit a glass ceiling, because many companies felt that having a disabled executive showed a weak corporate structure (“Employment for Youth with Disabilities: Past Challenges and Future Opportunities,” n.d.). The Americans with Disabilities outlawed actions such as preventing opportunities when the disabled individual was perfectly qualified, and able to complete the job (“Review laws, regulations & standards,” n.d.).

Disabled youth may be inspired by those in power with disabilities. The first quadriplegic to be elected to Congress was Rep. James Langevin of Rhode Island. Langevin uses a wheelchair for mobility, and has a long history of holding elected office at the state and federal levels. He sponsored legislation throughout his service to advance opportunities for people with disabilities throughout the nation (“Jim Langevin,” n.d.). Senator Tammy Duckworth of Illinois faces combat-related disabilities, but she continues to fight for the people of Illinois, and people with disabilities across the United States. These members of Congress represent more than their constituents, they are fighters, and provide inspiration for disabled youth.

Protections start with education, the basis of any career. Elevators, ramps, and reasonable accommodations are required under Federal law, providing accessibility for a good education to everyone, including disabled youth. Basic accessibility features were not applied to many buildings until required after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Receiving the job does no good if you do not have access to the facilities you need. The protections that affect your career extend farther than only preventing discrimination within employment (“Review laws, regulations & standards,” n.d.).

Nearly every career is available to disabled youth. Whether it’s a politician, nurse, engineer, accountant, or CEO, its achievable for disabled youth through protections like the Americans with Disabilities Act. Accessibility features provide access to features you may need within employment. Inspiration to disabled youth is present throughout society, from powerful figures such as Rep. Langevin, and Sen. Duckworth, to international figures such as Richard Branson of United Kingdom-based Virgin Group (“CEOs you never knew had a disability,” 2020).

Mariah Wilson

Parkersburg South High School

Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future

People with disabilities have existed since the beginning of mankind. What is disability? A disability is something that is related to your hearing, cognitive, sight, or mobility abilities. Today, many people with disabilities do not necessarily identify themselves as disabled.

During Grecian times, it was typical of the culture to fixate on the idea of “perfection,” so people with disabilities were ignored. Grecians did not believe people with disabilities could be cured, healed, or were worthy of being employed.

In the Early Middle Ages, most people with disabilities could not take care of themselves. The people of the town did not accept people who had disabilities, so they were often excluded from society and homeless. Families of children with disabilities would often send the child to the woods to be abandoned, or the children were hidden under houses. The families were often embarrassed if their child had a disability. In those times, the word “disability” did not exist. People with disabilities were referred to as “idiots”. Many of the devout felt people with disabilities were evil and believed that they were sent by the devil. When people with disabilities did find work, which was very hard to do, they often had very dangerous jobs.

In the 1820’s, people with disabilities could get work but only if they knew someone who needed some work done. It was generally manual labor. During World War I, people with disabilities were not fighting on the frontlines. However, many people with disabilities were working in the coal mines. The environment was very dangerous and not safe, in general. On top on this, their pay was not equal to that of their typically-functioning coworkers. Other types of professions people with disabilities had during the early to mid 1900’s included farmers, “freak show” performers in the circus, shoemakers, street vendors, and carpenters.

World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War all had an impact on the rights of people with disabilities because many servicemen and women were coming back home with injuries that permanently disabled them. This is what started a jump in activism for people with disabilities.

In 1973, Arlene Mayerson said, “Accommodating a person with a disability is no longer a matter of charity but instead a basic issue of civil rights.” She wrote this in an article based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act which went into effect in that same year. Section 504 ensures that organizations and employers are including people with disabilities when it comes to services and program benefits.

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into effect by President George H.W. Bush. The ADA is very important to people with disabilities because it is very detailed and is said to be comprehensive. It protects people with disabilities in the workforce, in the public, and in schools. It also created a widespread awareness of the accessibility needs that people with disabilities require for their day-to-day lives. ADA and other key pieces of

District 3 First Place



Mariah Wilson is a senior at Parkersburg High School. Over the course of her high school career, she was consistently on the honor roll and on the principal’s list. The West Virginia Deaf Services Center awarded her with the Good Attitude Award for her outstanding attitude.

She plans to complete her cosmetology requirements at WVU-Parkersburg and then attend Rochester Institute of Technology to obtain her business degree. Her career goal is to own and run her own salon one day. ■





District 3 Second Place



Abbigail Kimble is a senior at Tyler Consolidated High School. She will graduate with a 4.359 GPA. During high school, she was an active participant in the award-winning Knights Marching Band playing the trombone, a member of the local 4-H, 2022 National Champion Land Judging Team, and the Runner-Up Champion Homesite Evaluation Team in Oklahoma City. She currently serves as the chapter President of the FFA organization.

Abigail is an animal lover and has dreamed of becoming a veterinarian since childhood. Her love for animals started at a young age, growing up in a family of cattle producers and other various farm animals. Her home life and high school career motivated her to become a doctor who could treat animals and ensure their comfort. ■



Abbigail Kimble

Tyler Consolidated High School

“Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future.”

Youth with disabilities throughout history have faced difficulties in getting work skills and finding jobs in their desired career paths. At certain times throughout history individuals with disabilities could only find work that exploited their mental and physical differences through freak shows and circuses in the late 1840s and early 1900s. Despite discrimination, people with disabilities have worked and been successful in every field given the right supports.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 emphasized employment as the primary goal of vocational rehabilitation. The purpose of the act was to mandate presumptive employability, meaning applicants should be presumed to be employable unless proven otherwise. The amendments state that eligible individuals must be provided choice and increased control in determining vocational rehabilitation goals and objectives, determining services, service providers, and methods of service provision.

Since 1975, students with disabilities were provided educational rights by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, also referred to as IDEA. The main purpose of IDEA is to ensure that all youth with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. Students with disabilities are guaranteed a more productive and functioning transition process. It is critical that this be taken seriously so students are not leaving high school unprepared to meet the challenges of their chosen career path.

In order to promote a productive transition, it is helpful to plan ahead. For students with disabilities, the first step in planning is developing a transition plan which is a section of a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) that outlines transition goals and services needed to meet those goals. An effective transition plan will not only take into consideration a student’s goals, needs, and preferences, but also consideration of post-secondary education, career path and goals and adult living. This takes a team effort as the student, members of the family, teachers, and school administration must work together to guide a student through the transition process. The first step to the transition plan is an age-appropriate assessment. The intention of this assessment is to increase the student’s self-worth, confidence and success while keeping the student’s strengths and interests in mind. Some questions asked during this assessment may include: “What are my unique talents and interests?” “What do I want in life, now and in the future?” and, “What are some of life’s demands that I can meet now?” This assessment is to be updated annually, as it is tied to the student’s goals and needs that are represented in the student’s Individualized Education Program.

Once this assessment is completed, the post-secondary goals can be formed to include employment, continuing education, adult services, and independent living as a part of transition. This allows students with disabilities to prosper and be able to identify their future goals. The goals must be realistic to where the student is currently functioning in life. The IEP team members must allow the student to demonstrate self-determination and decision-making by allowing the student to share their vision for the future.

Sophia Raines Independence High School

Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future

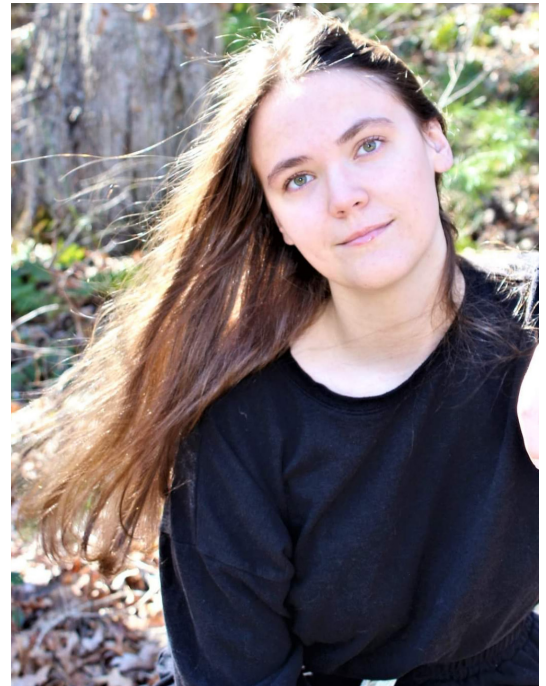
Society has ingrained in us the need for equality; since primary school, the idea of the only thing being “fair” is everyone having the same resources has been drilled into our minds. Let me present a hypothetical to those who don’t see an issue with this: if you have a six-foot wall and two people, one over six feet tall and the other under six feet tall, who are both trying to see over the wall, equality dictates we watch one look over with ease and the other struggle on their tip-toes to peer over the top. What our society needs is equity; provide the shorter person with a chair and observe them both being able to see (Juda). Equal outcomes are far more important than equal opportunities, and seeing that is something that our society has struggled and continues to struggle with. Career options for people with disabilities used to be severely limited, but there has been a revolution of change. While today’s system still isn’t perfect, the implementation of protection laws, education laws, and employment programs pertaining to those with disabilities have helped to lessen the gap.

Our society tends to see something/someone who deviates from the “norm” as vulnerable. While it is necessary for protection acts to extend to people with disabilities, this is to protect their right to live their lives, not to protect them from life. Normal is a man-made concept that fails to take ingenuity and uniqueness into consideration. I am not normal and you are not normal. For someone to be normal they would have to be exceedingly artificial; no one person is going to fit into the idea of society perfectly. In the past, authorities had trouble recognizing this, but things began to change for the better in the 1970s. Take, for example, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits federal programs from discriminating against “otherwise qualified individuals.”(Disability Rights History in WV). If they are qualified, what was the point of contention in the first place? Is the fact of a person existing outside a cookie cutter perspective of society truly that preposterous? Of course not; hence the act protecting the individual’s right to independence and not the individual themselves.

Part of what determines career options is the educational foundation of a person. This, too, was a hard fight to win. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) established the right of children with disabilities to a public school education in an integrated environment; in 1976, a year later, an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1972 provided services to students with physical disabilities entering college (Disability Rights History in WV). Sometimes to be on equal ground with their peers a student is going to need a little boost – which is, of course, completely okay under the rules of equity. I myself struggled with a speech impediment in my youth and needed extra classes to help me communicate with others. Taking these classes did not make me lesser than my classmates; finishing the classes did not make me feel superior to those still in them. They were just a ladder helping me climb a wall that was only a step up for some people. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 speaks to this by ensuring each school provides assistive technology devices and services needed for a student to obtain a free appropriate education (Office of Special Education). We’re all running the race of life, some of us are just taking different routes.

Perhaps most beneficial to the fight for equity are the employment programs
(See Raines p20)

District 4 First Place



Sophia Raines is a senior at Independence High School. During her high school career, she was involved in student council, peer leadership, and served as treasurer of the National Honor Society. She was also the Future Business Leaders of America president and Beta president. She’s been published in the international online literary journal Write the World Review (a literary journal publishing standout teen writers ages 13-19).

She plans to carry a double major in psychology and creative writing. During her free time, she enjoys volunteering as a coach, writing, gardening, and growing gourds when the weather permits. ■





District 4 Second Place



Bailey Caraway is a senior at Greenbrier East High School and has maintained a 4.0 GPA. During high school, she took several Honors, Advanced Placement, and Dual Credit classes. She also acquired several college credits and certifications. She participated in the Student Government Association and was Senior Class President. She is a member of the National Honors Society, and a member of HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America) serving as Vice President.

She has participated in gymnastics since she was three, which led her to try out for the Greenbrier East Cheerleading team her sophomore year. She plans to pursue a career in physical therapy by majoring in Biomechanics at Marshall University. Being a student-athlete has helped her develop a strong, well-rounded skill set, especially in healthcare.

She also plans to minor in psychology. ■



Bailey Caraway Greenbrier East High School

“Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future.”

In the past, people with disabilities have had difficult times finding career paths that would be accepting and suitable for them. In the 1900s people with disabilities were often treated very unfairly. They weren't given the same opportunities as other people in America, at the time. Often, people with disabilities would be sent to hospitals specialized for their disabilities and were never given the chance to even attempt to take part in a job. While researching on this particular topic, I stumbled upon the article, A Civil Rights History: Americans with Disabilities, which stated, “Some states passed laws forbidding people with disabilities from marrying or having children, which sometimes provoked forced sterilization.” However, later in the same article it was discussed how laws were passed to integrate war veterans back into the workplace. Why couldn't congress pass laws to help integrate people with disabilities into the workplace? These examples show true struggles that people with disabilities were presented with in the past.

Thankfully, in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act had been passed. According to U.S. Department of Labor, “This act prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications and access to state and local government' programs and services.” I believe that the Americans with Disabilities Act is one of the biggest successes.

Today, I believe that there are certainly several career paths for people with disabilities. One of the biggest and expanding career paths is technology. Technology is also going to be vastly important in the future, so I believe that it is definitely a good path to go down. For a lot of technology jobs, you can work remotely which would provide a good career option for people with disabilities who might not physically be able to commute to a job. There are also several career paths that would be good for innovative people. Some of these include: graphic designing, producing art for art galleries, or maybe even architecture.

I believe that in the future, there will be even more choices for career paths. From what I have observed throughout my life, people with disabilities tend to work part-time jobs. However, in the future I hope to see more people with disabilities at college, working in hospitals, working as teachers or professors, and working even more important jobs.

In conclusion, people with disabilities should be able to pursue any career that they put their mind to. In the past people with disabilities were very limited on the career paths they could pursue. Compared to the past, there are many more options for people with disabilities to choose as their career. I hope that we can continue to work to create even more opportunities for people with disabilities in the future. Of course, this wouldn't be possible if it weren't for one of the first milestones: the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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Grant Shumaker

Spring Valley High School

“Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future.”

There is no price tag to place on a person, but we all have value. Similarly, there is no store that sells dignity though we all deserve to own it.

I believe that all people are worthy of a dignified life that contains mutual respect regardless of abilities or appearance. My life experiences with people with learning or physical disabilities have provided me insight into the topic of youth with disabilities. My exposure to individuals with varying levels of disability has helped me understand the importance of respecting someone’s life. This is something I consider regardless of a person’s ability or inability to adapt to a situation. Everyone deserves to live their life and prosper through work. Their life is constructed of all things that are important to them and is made unique because of their skills, their experiences and their capabilities. Those three elements shape the past, present and future of how people with disabilities can pursue and excel in careers.

As a society we have heard the use of the term “glass ceiling” frequently regarding the equality shown to women pursuing career paths and social advancement. Perhaps that glass ceiling also once capped the potential for people with disabilities. With his signature on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, former President George H.W. Bush helped change the course of the opportunities available for people with disabilities, according to the US Department of Labor article titled “Disability and Employment: A Timeline”. Although President Bush’s act was promising for disabled workers, the businesses reacted in a way that did not allow these workers the same opportunities. Eight years after President Bush signed the ADA, President Clinton followed him by implementing a presidential task force that would deal with ensuring inclusiveness in business. In doing this, businesses across the country were immediately hiring workers with disabilities and they were given more equal opportunities.

For me as a young adult I have noticed that many of the disabled people that I have been surrounded by have special talents that are unique to them. I have noticed that they are creative people who can think outside of the box in ways others can’t. We can learn a lesson from disabled workers because they are extremely intelligent, and they have a grittiness and willingness to work unlike many in our society today. In my personal experience from my community, we have a young man who works hard like no other. His life’s love is coffee, and all varieties of it. His most predominate trait was how much he wanted to help. Shortly after graduating high school, he decided that he wanted to create a mobile coffee shop that would allow him to deliver coffee to elderly people who may not be able to get coffee on their own. For me, this taught me lessons that stuck with me and will continue to build me as a person sensitive to others’ special talents. This young man never let anyone tell him what he could or couldn’t accomplish. His greatest concern was helping people, which is a lesson that many of us could hone.

Going into the future, disabled workers can do whatever they wish, regardless of their disability. Technology has changed many things within our progressive world especially for people with disabilities. The 21st Century has allowed

(See Shumaker p22)

District 5 First Place



Grant Shumaker is a senior at Spring Valley High School. In his high school career, he was the captain of the Varsity Baseball team, a Heisman Scholar Recipient, and the Mountain State Athletic Conference Student-Athlete of the Year. He was also an All-State baseball selection. The skills he possesses in terms of leadership and communication are remarkable.

Grant volunteers his time at OVP (Ohio Valley Physicians) Health and Facing Hunger Food Bank. He enjoys playing golf, watching movies, and spending time with family and friends. ■





District 5 Second Place



Holley Riggs is a senior at Spring Valley High School. She maintained a 4.0 GPA throughout her high school career. For three years she has been involved with the Spring Valley High School dance team. She can clearly communicate her needs efficiently and is strong-minded.

Ms. Riggs volunteered her time helping with school-related activities and assisting neighboring communities when Eastern Kentucky was hit by a flood.

She enjoys spending her free time exercising and spending time with her family, friends, and dogs. She plans to attend Mountwest Community College to become a physical therapy assistant. ■



Holley Jae Riggs Spring Valley High School

“Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future”

Up until the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century, America viewed children with disabilities as commodities to be accommodated rather than educated and integrated. Career paths for youths and young adults with disabilities were often limited to menial jobs with little to no hope of advancement, recognition, or fulfillment.

The Disability Employment Act of the 1940’s promised some sort of security to people with disabilities. This act prohibited “covered employers from discriminating against people with disabilities in all employment-related activities, including hiring, pay, benefits, firing and promotions. Covered employers include private businesses, educational institutions, employment agencies, labor organizations, and state and local government entities with 15 or more employees” (www.dol.gov). Although this act did not eliminate all the obstacles they faced, it certainly benefited them until 1975.

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) to protect “the rights of, meeting the individual needs of, and improving the results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities and their families” (sites.ed.gov). This law’s name became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 (sites.ed.gov).

People with disabilities were treated as less than. They were often institutionalized for their so called “conditions.” Some were not even allowed to step foot into a school because of something out of their control. Consequently, this had a negative impact on their education, social skills, friendships, and their physical health. Although their disability may have been observable, often the most damaging effects were emotional. Not being granted with the same opportunities would make someone with a disability feel as if they do not belong in the same society they see around them day to day. They were often relegated too such menial jobs as janitors, dishwashers, and other low skilled jobs. They were too often seen as nothing more than their disability.

Now people with disabilities can be found in nearly field of endeavor. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 made it unlawful for employers to discriminate against people with disabilities in such areas as recruitment, pay, training, job assignments, and many others. Because of the leveling of this employment field, many of the constraints that people with disabilities used to face have been removed or reduced.

Today’s society is becoming more equitable in opening access to the American Dream. No one should be denied the fruits of prosperity that should be promised to all Americans--both those with and without disabilities. Perhaps one day, we may elect a President with a disability because he or she will be the best person for the job. No more hiding like Franklin D. Roosevelt. ■

Brooke Jacobs Frankfort High School

“Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future”

You can be anything you want when you grow up! Many children hear this a million times throughout their childhood, but can they? Over the past 30 years the ADA has helped and supported numerous people with disabilities obtain, keep, and prosper in countless careers. As a type 1 diabetic, this topic impacts many facets of my life as I move from high school to college. I must be aware of all the precautions I should take before I head down my career path.

Knowledge and information solve most problems. In the past, many people with disabilities were not employed because companies were not in the know of the disabilities of those in search for jobs. Companies and employment agencies wouldn't hire people with a disability and look beyond their resume just because they saw that they had a disability. Without being in the know of those who have disabilities, companies didn't recognize that there were care plans and actions that could've been taken to make an accommodating workplace. The access to the internet also made this hard for companies to realize further actions were an option. Additional research into a certain disability in the workplace was also very hard to do since google wasn't a thing then.

As for today, people with disabilities are supported through numerous laws. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is an act that forbids intolerance against those with a disability. This law is heavily used and known throughout all employers and companies today. It is forced and utilized in industries throughout the United States. The ADA also protects those with disabilities and helps us advocate for our work life. Compared to the past, we know our rights and how we should be treated in and out of the workplace. With google being as prevalent as it is, companies, industries, and employers have more access to research and use google to understand those with disabilities. The technology and acts that have been made and invented throughout history have increasingly helped those with disabilities find and create better lives for themselves through their jobs.

In the near future, the technology that will be advanced, developed, and invented can ultimately change the world that people with disabilities have to face. With the technological world continually improving, the advancements could forever change and lessen the struggles that we face every day. Considering the amount of jobs that are expanding and opening to people with disabilities in the present, it is possible that all jobs will allow people like me to work in. ■

District 6 First Place



Brooke Jacobs is a senior at Frankfort High School. During high school, she achieved the titles of Student of the Month, Homecoming Queen, All Area, All PVC, and All-Region for Cross-Country, Cross-Country State Qualifier, and Track State Qualifier. In addition, she is a member of the National Honor Society, National Technical Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Secretary, Falcon Fanatic, and Student Section Leader.

Brooke has completed more than 200 hours of community service. As a counselor-in-training, she served a group of eight young diabetic girls at Camp Kno Koma, a diabetes camp. Additionally, she was a counselor for 20 children at a local camp for 6th graders.

Since 2020, she has been running her own vinyl and sticker company, 1st Chance Designs. She plans to attend Davis & Elkins College to study Chemistry and also to major in Product Design. She plans to run for the cross-country and track teams. ■





District 6 Second Place



Jason Bednarski is a senior at Martinsburg High School. During high school, he was involved in the Student Council, ACE (Academic Competition of Excellence), and the National Honors Society (NHS). His greatest accomplishments include getting invited to ACE and getting scholarships to pay for college.

The ACE (Academic Competition of Excellence) and the NHS (National Honors Society) are two of the organizations where Mr. Bednarski volunteers. During his free time, he enjoys swimming, reading, and playing video games with his friends and family. ■



Jason Bednarski Martinsburg High School

“Career Paths for Youth with Disabilities: The Past, Present, and Future”

Historically, people with disabilities have been unfairly treated, from being forced to be sterilized, being killed, and being left out of important legislation. There are still many challenges people with disabilities face today. Luckily there have been many successes for people with disabilities like those from Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who is the first person with a disability to be elected president, and the Americans with Disabilities Act which helped people with disabilities get jobs.

For much of history, people that had physical or mental disabilities were separated from society, treated poorly, and looked down upon for something that they could not help. Some examples of these difficult times for people with disabilities include, in 1907, when the state of Indiana enacted the Eugenic Sterilization for People with Disabilities. This was a law that required anyone with a mental or physical disability to be sterilized in institutions, and then in 1927, compulsory sterilization was ruled constitutional. Another horrible thing that happened to people with disabilities was during World War II when Adolph Hitler ordered widespread “mercy killing” of the disabled. During this program 75,000-250,000 people with disabilities were killed. I became deeply saddened when I learned that these events had happened to people with disabilities just because they were different from others. Since I am a person that has a physical disability, Muscular Dystrophy, a degenerative muscle disease, this was hard for me to hear because I can just imagine if I were born and lived during World War II in Europe I potentially could have been killed or forced into an institution. Another disturbing thing happened when the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 because even though it helped end discrimination against African Americans and women in the workplace, it did not include any provisions for people with disabilities. Therefore, people with disabilities continued to be discriminated against in the workplace and were denied equal opportunities to participate in and contribute to society. These were just some of the more recent struggles that people with disabilities have faced. Required sterilization, being systematically killed by the Nazis during World War II, and being left out when the United States passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, all left disabled people vulnerable, threatened and excluded. Thankfully there was a United States President, who lived with a disability, and was able to help shed light on the equal abilities possessed by people with disabilities, which helped to slowly change attitudes and bring change.

Even though 75,000-250,000 people with disabilities were killed by the Nazis in World War II. Successes for people who had disabilities started when Franklin Delano Roosevelt who was paralyzed from the waist down after contracting polio on a vacation was elected President in 1932. He was the first President to be elected that had a disability, which gave hope to everyone with a disability because they believed more legislation would be passed to benefit people with disabilities. Another immense success for people with disabilities happened on August 14, 1935, when President Franklin Roosevelt signed into law the Social Security Act, this is a program that established permanent assistance for adults with disabilities. Both successes were very encouraging for people with disabilities because they were now given support from the government, at least financially, even though they still could not be in the workforce equally with non-disabled people. Then in 1947 there was a National “Employ the

(See Bednarski p21)

(Zheng continued from p2)

opportunities to build their lives with equality. Theoretically, over thirty years later, such a scenario should have become the reality. However, unfortunately, it was a false statement.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2022, only 23.8% of people with disabilities were participating in the labor market. It was almost three times less than the average for people without disabilities. Moreover, among those who participated in labor market, people with disabilities were twice as likely to be unemployed as their non-disabled counterparts. Considering that millions of individuals can and do work despite their disabilities, these data suggested that people with disabilities still face more difficulties in getting hired than those without disabilities. With the situation understood, the government had identified guideposts that are important for all youth with disabilities to successfully transition to their adulthood, and actions had been taken to further support them on their way to moving into career paths ("Employment").

Standing in the present and looking into the market, it is not hard to find jobs that offer conveniences to individuals with disabilities. For example, job positions in an office usually do not require much physical dexterity, stamina, or mobility. There are a lot of paths sharing this feature in many different fields for youth with disabilities to choose from, such as careers in management, education, business, technology, and healthcare. Many of these careers also offer special opportunities for people with visual or hearing impairments. In addition, employers are required to make reasonable accommodations for job candidates and employees with disabilities under the ADA. Such accommodations can be as straightforward as making the workplace not mobility-limited, applying assistive technologies, or offering flexible working schedules (Sweeney). Workers with disabilities, therefore, can focus on their preferred career matters with minimum negative influence caused by their impairments.

Time is always flowing in the company of chances and challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic is an inspiring case. Before the pandemic, only a quarter of Americans worked from home, and now this number has dramatically increased (Sweeney). Remote working frees the inconvenience of transportation for people with disabilities and gives them the chance to pursue broader career opportunities. What comes along with chances are fresh challenges. For example, people with hearing impairments can find it difficult to understand in Zoom meetings. Similarly, people with reading and writing disorders may be overwhelmed by tons of information shown on the screen, and their productivity can be reduced by long time usage of digital devices (Peralta). But these problems become solvable with the involvement of technology. The launch of caption function in Zoom helps translate voices to words, and words in one language can be translated into another one. Word document launched its read aloud function which transforms words into voices, freeing people's eyes from digital screens. These assistive functions originally designed for accessibility are now widely accepted and used by people with no disabilities. What may lie ahead in the future is that "if we start creating technology with users in mind that have disabilities, then we're going to end up creating a universal type of design that everyone will enjoy (Peralta)." With the help of all sorts of mature technologies, youth with disabilities by that time will be able to step onto their career paths just like the others.

Career paths for youth with disabilities are expanded and illumined through the disability rights movement and the advancement of technology, as the
(See Zheng p16)

(Smith continued from p4)

disabilities, mandated accommodation to both the workplace and public transportation, and absolutely prohibited the discrimination of a person or youth with mental and physical disabilities [3]. Even though there is a myriad of acts passed, the ADA was the most effective disability right legislation in America.

Thanks to the strenuous events that has occurred in our past, youth with disabilities now have access to a broad variety of careers that can accommodate their needs – and can make some pretty paychecks. Business jobs like management, administration, and computer tech work are a great career area for young adults with physical disabilities, as it does not require much physical movement and relies heavily on communication and people skills. These jobs include : medical/ healthcare administration, accounting or bookkeeping, marketing, IT or computer support, and counseling [6].

Artistic jobs are very broad, yet they seem to often accommodate to young adults with cognitive or mental disabilities, as art doesn't really have a "cookie-cutter" set of rules. All that is required is creativity and maybe technical art skills (if college is in the picture). Art makes it possible to make your own rules and schedule, therefore making it a very manageable and even fun job for youth with mental disabilities. These jobs include: cosmetology, graphic designer, painter/artist, photographer, animator, and even interior designer. Blue collar jobs are also available like welding, chef, technician, electrician, and machinery operator [6]. All of these jobs are not only high in demand and will continue to be, but they can accommodate any kind of disability. By no means are youth with disabilities subjected or stereotyped to one specific field that I've listed. These jobs focus on enhancing strong skills already present in youths with both mental and physical disabilities.

In conclusion, career paths for youth with disabilities have not always been available like they are in modern times. Years of determination, fight, and resilience from past activists with disabilities has formed careers for youth in the present and future. While there is still ignorance and stereotypes regarding disabilities, society now has given people with disabilities respect in the workforce and a multitude of jobs are now available. The struggles, laws, and perseverance has past

(See Smith p17)



(Looney continued from p3)

half enroll in college (47%) compared to 63% of people without disabilities, and only 16% finish college (compared to 30% of people without disabilities). (Warfield).

Despite all of the past efforts, people with disabilities still fell behind in obtaining employment. Many states, communities, and organizations have been trying to improve efforts to provide employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. (Warfield).

According to the 2021 Annual Labor Force Statistics, 35.2% of people with disabilities were employed compared to 76.5% of people without disabilities. (U.S. Department of Labor).

In the past, people with disabilities were paid less than minimum wage. A major federal program that facilitates jobs for people with disabilities working on government contracts will soon no longer allow them to be paid less than minimum wage. Under a rule finalized in July 2022, the AbilityOne Program will disallow payment of what's known as subminimum wage. Current law allows employers to obtain special 14(c) certificates from the U.S. Department of Labor to pay people with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, but several cities and states are barring the practice. (Diament).

There have been many advances in career paths for youth with disabilities. There are several state agencies that provide services for individuals with disabilities, which were not offered in the past. Some of those include the West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council (WVSILC), the Centers for Independent Living (CIL) and the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS).

The West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council (WVSILC) was established under the 1992 amendments of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Their mission is 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. (West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council).

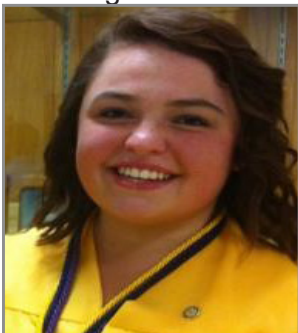
The Centers for Independent Living (CIL) is designed and operated by individuals with disabilities. CIL provides independent living services for people with disabilities. They work to support community living and independence for people with disabilities across the nation based on the belief that all people can live with dignity, make their own choices and participate fully in society. (Administration for Community Living).

The West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) is to support youth and adults with disabilities on their path to work and live independently. DRS (See Looney p16)

Alexandria Rundle
2013 State Winner
East Fairmont
High School

Mason Ryck
2014 State Winner
Robert C. Byrd
High School

Blake Huffman
2015 State Winner
Winfield
High School



(Zheng continued from p15)

workplace is narrowing over time. Why not dream big—the phrase “youth with disabilities,” in a not too distant future, will only exist in the past.



Lingjian Zheng, the state winner of the 2023 Disability History Essay Contest was presented with a check, a certificate and a key chain at Parkersburg South High School's award ceremony by DRS representative Jennifer Surface.

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(Smith continued from p15)

struggles, laws, and perseverance has ensured that youth with disabilities will work harmoniously with society, and that they receive the equal amounts of respect and rights. That is how the past built the future.

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Source #4 - <https://mn.gov/mnddc/ada-legacy/npr-504.html>

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(Brannon continued from p6)

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(Looney continued from p15)

provides career services that help individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain, regain, maintain or advance in employment. Counselors help individuals with disabilities access interests and abilities, as well as explore career options to develop individual plans that will empower each person to meet his or her unique goals. (West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services).

People with disabilities have the right and the responsibility to be productive citizens engaged in competitive, integrated employment with the services and support needed to do so. (West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council).

As you can see, there have been many improvements in helping people with disabilities. Although, there are still areas of improvement that could be made, the past has and will continue to make a better future for individuals with disabilities. The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) paved the way for dramatic cultural changes in the way people with disabilities were treated and the opportunities available to them. Like all people, people with disabilities wish to live a full and happy life.

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(Looney continued from p16)

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David Brannon, district 2, 2nd place winner of the 2023 Disability History Essay Contest was presented with a check, a certificate and a key chain at Gilmer County High School's award ceremony by West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council member Emily Robertson.



Gabriella Selder, district 2, 1st place winner of the 2023 Disability History Essay Contest was presented with a check, a certificate and a key chain at Morgantown High School's award ceremony by West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council member Christine Wilcox.

(Wilson continued from p7)

legislation may have made it harder for employers to be discriminatory, but many people with disabilities still have struggles with employment even today.

Bias is a key factor for many people with disabilities. Likely many employers do not have explicit bias but they may be biased against someone who has a disability due to their lack of training, experience, or education on the needs of people with disabilities. While bias is not what it used to be, it still exists as a hurdle for people with disabilities.

One big factor in helping people with disabilities get job is the Department of Rehabilitation Services. DRS helps people with disabilities to find a jobs and to continue working at their jobs. DRS can help with accommodations that a person with a disability might need; for example: a deaf person with hearing aids which, help them hear better. DRS can also help get an FM system or a microphone to use in the work environment. Also, they help with college, training funds, and education assistance and more.

Technology in recent years has played a big role in helping people with disabilities find and keep jobs. For example, people who have vision impairments can use their cell phones to “see” their money, provide verbal descriptions, and so on. A person with hearing loss can use a cell phone to help with communication and to utilize video interpreting services on command. Communication boards can be installed on smart devices via an app for individuals with communication needs. Zoom Meetings have made accessibility easier for people with disabilities

Covid-19 played a key role in helping people with disabilities without everyone knowing it. It has been proven that many people could be productive when they worked from home if their jobs allowed for it. This would I help people who have chronic illnesses or struggle with mobility. It has been more acceptable to work from home because of the Covid pandemic.

In the future, I believe that there will continue to be hardships— there is no such thing as a perfect world, no matter how much we want one. Supports will continue to grow for people with disabilities, and acceptance will be more widespread. With continued technology growth and the placement of many laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, general knowledge and access will only become more prominent. We will persevere.

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(Selders continued from p5)

to help develop an individual for employment (Employment Consideration for Youth With Disabilities). The Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act also reinforces the focus on employment opportunities for youth with disabilities.

In recent years, the number of youth with disabilities working or seeking out work has risen. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2021 reported 21.3% of individuals with disabilities aged 16 and up were working or seeking work. Even among those with disabilities who are employed, few are working full-time or nearly full-time, acquiring company-paid benefits, and/or earning a living wage (Mank, 2007). However, every year since 2012, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has seen an increase in workers with disabilities as more laws are amended and further progress from the Disability Rights Movement continues to propel more people to seek out employment. Job Corps, offering job training and free residential education, is an example of services for those aged 18-24 with disabilities to transition into a career. There is even the Workforce Recruitment Program and federal jobs which provide accommodations to qualified employees. Target, Kroger, and Lowes, among other companies, have established themselves as career paths for youth with disabilities as well. There are also places designed for those with disabilities to work within their community. Day programs and sheltered workshops, often called “facility-based,” provide employment and non-employment services in one location where most individuals have a disability (Butterworth et al., 2013). Unfortunately, with so many opportunities for education and employment, discrimination still affects youth with disabilities. According to the 2012 National Core Indicators Project, only one in seven adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are employed, with even fewer youth with said disabilities being hired as well, even though those with intellectual and developmental disabilities can succeed and desire to be employed (Migliore et al., 2007; Migliore et al., 2008). Even with IDEA, there needs to be more career counseling, life skill focus, and earlier development of all the things required for an easy transition into adulthood within the educational process. Defeating bias in the workplace can be done with accommodations. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) employment provisions, when individuals with disabilities disclose their disability and their needed accommodations then the employer must provide reasonable accommodations. The accommodations are covered by the law, so it is up to the individual if they wish to disclose their employment or post-secondary educational experiences. A concern that employers tend to have is if the accommodations are costly. The median cost of accommodations is about \$600 as 72 percent of individuals report that needed accommodations were accessible. Youth with disabilities are often not expensive with their accommodations, either.

Turning towards the future, there are hopes to further diminish employment discrimination against all youth with disabilities. There also needs to be a conversation about the discrimination those with specific disabilities face during seeking out career paths. As more legislation rolls out to protect youth with disabilities’ right to work, there needs to be more visibility of those who face workplace discrimination. Examples of continuing to combat this problem in the future would be workplace training on discrimination and offering a higher understanding of those who suffer from discrimination itself. Increasing the visibility of youth with disabilities in employment and in media will help to further humanize one another. As more programs such as IDEA and ADA protect the right to work for youth with disabilities and accommodations are met, the number of those working and seeking out employment will continue to rise in the country. These foundational pieces of legislation are a good starting point, now the public must carry forward with them. ■

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Lydia Andlinger
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The Linsly School



Hannah Casey
2021 State Winner
The Linsly School



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St. Marys High School





(Raines continued from p9)

Perhaps most beneficial to the fight for equity are the employment programs for those with disabilities offered by the state of West Virginia. Consider it a helping hand to get you steady on your feet before you start to run. The WV Association of Rehabilitation, Inc (WVARF) serves as the state's Central Nonprofit Agency linking people with disabilities to employment opportunities and the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) helps people with disabilities work towards and reach vocational goals (Employment | Center for Excellence in Disabilities). This provides many with paths to success that, prior to the establishment of these programs, did not exist (Pathways to the Future - Hiring People With Disabilities). The present is far more friendly than the past. Beyond just these programs, though, is the advancement of technology. Assistive technology devices are becoming more complex, allowing those with disabilities freedoms not previously afforded to them (Technology). Career options are expanded every day for those with disabilities; though we're not yet to the point of equal outcome, the effort is being made daily.

No person is the same, nor can any one person be defined by a single characteristic. All of us are the sum of our parts plus potential – multiply that by equity, and we're really getting somewhere. When you stop and consider, it's really quite beautiful that humans can (and do) live so many different ways. Every one of us is a chapter in the great mystery of life. Career opportunities for people with disabilities in the past were weak bordering on nonexistent, and while the present most definitely offers more, the future is still uncharted. We are standing at the precipice of greatness and all it's going to cost us is time; the question is how expensive it's going to be. You can't have a happy ending without starting the journey, and this is a path we must all travel together – though we may have different maps, the final destination is the same. Equality is within our grasp, but it can only be reached through equity; and with each protection, education, and employment law we're one step closer to victory.

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Employment | Center for Excellence in

(Kimble continued from p8)

After developing a student's Individualized Education Program with their annual goals and services needed, IDEA requires a summary of performance. A summary of performance takes all data collected on the student and compiles it into one section. This will include the student's academic achievement, and performance, while making recommendations for what the student should do to reach their goals. The intent of this summary is to provide assistance to the student and ultimately enhance their post-school outcomes. This is to be completed in the final year of the student's high school education, so that it includes the most updated information. Just with any other step, engaging students in the development of the summary of performance allows the student to speak freely and comfortably.

Many studies show that there are a number of opportunities and programs available post- graduation for youth with disabilities. Programs include two-year and four-year colleges and universities, trade and vocational schools, adult education programs, and employment outcomes in competitive integrated employment or supported employment. If a student is planning on attending college, there are a number of steps to be taken in order to choose the right college. Steps that students with disabilities are encouraged to take are provided in "A Transition Guide; To Post Secondary Education and Employment For Students and Youth With Disabilities". Steps include: taking interesting and challenging courses to prepare for college, being involved in school or community based activities, and being an active member in IEP programs. It is also really important to consider a college environment that provides students with disabilities with support services and programs, so that those students can perform to the best of their ability. For a student with disabilities it is important to obtain as much work experience as possible, in order to be more prepared for adult life. Obtaining and holding a job is a major challenge for young adults with disabilities. In *Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education*, author's state that young adults with disabilities typically have fewer employment options, as their abilities may be limited. This fact must be acknowledged because when a young adult with disabilities does manage to hold a job, it serves as a confidence booster. It provides the young adult with a new sense of pride and satisfaction. This should evoke a sense of respect for young adults with disabilities.

Put simply, the awareness that students with disabilities need guidance to transition successfully from high school to young adulthood is not enough. Teachers, family members, and school professionals must form together to make a plan of action and guide students into and through preparation. Without guidance and respect for the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, we will be failing at helping our students flourish through adulthood. ■

Will you be next?

(Bednarski continued from p14)

Physically Handicapped Week,” in Washington D.C. An event where a presidential committee launched publicity campaigns and had coordinated committees to emphasize the competence of people with disabilities. The election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt helped provide hope to people with disabilities, and a growing awareness that people with disabilities could strive for and achieve the highest of goals. The passing of the Social Security Act helped provide people with disabilities much needed financial support. Additionally, the National “Employ the Physically Handicapped Week,” helped prove to the country and the world that just because someone has a disability, it does not mean they are not competent enough to contribute to the workforce. During this period, there slowly began to be more job opportunities for people with disabilities because employers were encouraged to hire them, and people in general began to view disabled individuals more positively.

The change really started for people with disabilities when legislation was passed. One of the laws that was put in place to help people with disabilities get into the workforce was the Americans with Disabilities Act, which is a Civil Rights law that prohibits discrimination based on a disability. Also, under Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act was a significant part of it because it requires reasonable accommodations or adjustments to a certain job. This act is aggressively enforced to protect people with disabilities. In 1986, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments was passed. It defined “supported employment” and provided funding for supported employment projects and demonstrations. This act allowed people with disabilities to more easily and fairly enter into the workforce. Then in 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which added transition planning language so that the Individualized Education Plan that would include transition goals and linkages to other agencies to support transition prior to leaving school was passed. This helped because it is a program designed to help people with disabilities make a successful transition from school to the workforce. All these laws that were passed helped people with disabilities to be able to get a job because the Americans with Disabilities Act was able to require accommodations to the job or work environment. The Rehabilitation Act Amendment helped people with disabilities to be able to be in the workforce. The Individuals with Disabilities Act helped support the youth with disabilities by helping them make a smooth transition from school to the workforce. These laws have helped widen the scope of the career opportunities to what is currently available for youth with disabilities.

There were a great deal of hardships and difficulties and obstacles getting into the workforce throughout the world’s history for people with disabilities. Obstacles such as persecution, being institutionalized, or simply the lack of legal protections. Then we started to see changes and small victories for people with disabilities from when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected as the first person with a disability to become President, and to getting the Social Security Act passed to help provide financial support to people with disabilities. Sadly, there were still few career opportunities for youth with disabilities. Then when laws began to be passed to protect people with disabilities, they also gave the youth with disabilities greater career opportunities, which can be seen currently. After doing this research and seeing how far we have come from what happened in the early 19th century to now, I do have a lot of hope that future career opportunities for young people with disabilities will continue to expand, and someday soon, will be endless.■

(Raines continued from p20)

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Madison Smith, district 1, 2nd place winner of the 2023 Disability History Essay Contest was presented with a check, a certificate and a key chain at Sissionville High School's award ceremony by DRS representative Jeremy Hull.



(Shumaker continued from p11)

many medical advances that change the course for those who may have suffered an injury, which at that time put them out of a line of work or profession. Braces, hearing aids, glasses, and prosthetics are all on the list. According to the article "History of Prosthetics" written by the Premier Prosthetic Center, prosthetics are an idea that originated for a mummy in Ancient Egypt and has progressed to near lifelike replicas. Prosthesis allows people who might have lost a leg to then get a comfortable and effective alternative which allows them to do either the job they wish to do or a job that they may had not had the qualifications to do. In the future I believe that we as a nation should change the ways that we assist disabled people in adapting into our world. Personally, I believe that there is no one better to teach a deaf or a blind person how to live or work better than someone who suffers from the same disabilities.

In conclusion, people with disabilities are often blessed with advanced characteristics such as an astute awareness of numbers and dates due to their adequate memories. Disabled workers' experiences are also unique in the sense that they endure and overcome adversity. Their experiences in the work force allow them to create a connective network with their peers. All these characteristics lead me to believe that the more appropriate conclusion is that people with "disabilities" actually are people with exceptional abilities and skills sharpened by years of overcoming adversity and preparing for a diverse and inclusive work environment of the future. ■

Disability History: An Important Part of America's Heritage

Source: [US Department of Labor](#)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed by President George H. W. Bush on July 26, 1990. As a result of this landmark legislation, communities and workplaces across the nation have become more inclusive and welcoming for America's nearly 40 million people with disabilities.

Despite the ADA's importance, however, many Americans are unfamiliar with the events that led to its passage. Inspired by the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s and the feminist movement of the 1970s, disability leaders joined forces and took action, holding sit-ins in Federal buildings, blocking inaccessible buses from moving, drafting legislation, and protesting in the streets. And like the broader movements that preceded it, the disability rights movement had its own heroes and champions: Ed Roberts, Gini Laurie and Justin Dart to name a few.

Teaching children about the contributions of particular populations to our nation's history, such as women and people of various ethnic backgrounds, has been recognized as important through the declaration of dedicated months as well as other educational programs. Disability history, however, has been largely ignored in school curricula. This is particularly paradoxical since anyone, regardless of age, race, or heritage, may become a part of the population of people with disabilities at any time. But the tide is beginning to turn—due mainly to the grassroots efforts of young disability leaders.


Promoting Positive Change at the State Level

The youth-led movement for equal education on disability history celebrated its first victory in West Virginia in April 2006, when the West Virginia Youth Disability Caucus was instrumental in the passage of an act establishing the third week in October as "Disability History Week." This legislation requires public schools to educate students about disability history, people with disabilities, and the disability rights movement and encourages colleges and universities to promote awareness and understanding of disability history. Further, it encourages the legislature to provide recognition of Disability History Week through an annual proclamation and provide resources for instruction and activities.

Other states are following suit. The Florida Youth Council (FYC) is seeking to establish the first two weeks in October as "Disability History and Awareness Weeks" in Florida's public schools. This initiative began when the FYC took its idea to the 2006 Family Café Conference in Orlando, where they met with then Governor Jeb Bush, who agreed to support the effort by issuing an Executive Order. Subsequently, bills have been introduced in both the Florida House and Senate. Florida's youth leaders are now collaborating with youth leaders from other states interested in introducing similar bills.

The North Carolina Youth Leadership Network (NCYLN) successfully advocated for the month of October to be devoted to "Disability History and Awareness." In March 2007, proposed legislation was filed in the North Carolina House and Senate. To boost the effort, the NCYLN formed a partnership with the Alliance of Disability Advocates Center for Independent Living. With the backing of the disability community and other allies, including the North Carolina Parent Teacher Association, there was significant public support to pass the bill, which

I would like to thank you for your generous gift.
It will help me immensely in my education endeavors. I am wrapping up my first semester at Kent State University as an Architecture student.
I apologize for the delay in sending this.

Thank you again,

Tommy Charnie

(History continued from p22)

was signed by the Governor in July 2007.

Washington State successfully passed a bill that established October as “Disability History Month” in all public schools. In passing the bill, the legislature stated that “recognizing disability history will inspire students with disabilities to feel a greater sense of pride, reduce harassment and bullying, and help keep students with disabilities in school.” Washington’s bill also requires public institutions of higher education to provide educational activities related to disability history during the month.

Reflecting one of its 2007 legislative priorities, the Idaho State Independent Living Council proposed legislation establishing the third week of October as “Disability History Week,” during which Idaho schools would be required to instruct on disability history, the independent living movement, and disability rights. A con-current resolution making October “Disability History Month” was passed by the State Legislature in March and went into effect shortly thereafter. The resolution encourages education on disability history during October, but does not make it mandatory. Advocates are also trying to integrate disability history into the state curriculum and Idaho Standards Achievement Test.

Educating Tomorrow’s Leaders Today

These and other efforts to integrate disability history into schools and communities reflect one of the key components of effective youth leadership development—learning about the history, values, and beliefs of one’s society. Such youth leadership development experiences correlate with a number of positive outcomes, including decreases in negative behaviors (e.g., alcohol and tobacco use and violence) and increases in positive attitudes and behaviors (e.g., motivation, academic performance, self-esteem, problem-solving, positive health decisions, and interpersonal skills). Youth leadership development activities are similarly linked to increased self-efficacy and the development of skills such as goal-setting, decision-making, and working well with others, attributes essential for success in adulthood and employment—and future advocacy efforts. ■



Signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act

West Virginia Code §18-100-5 Disability History Week

Source: [WV Legislature](#)

(a) The third week of October annually is designated as Disability History Week for the State of West Virginia.

(b) In recognition of and to further the purposes of Disability History Week, each public school shall provide instruction on disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement. The instruction shall be integrated into the existing school curriculum in a manner such as, but not limited to, supplementing existing lesson plans, holding school assemblies or providing other school activities. The instruction may be delivered by school personnel or by guest speakers.

(c) State institutions of higher education are encouraged to conduct and promote activities that provide education, awareness and understanding of disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement.

(d) The Legislature is encouraged to annually recognize Disability History Week by introducing a concurrent resolution to:

- (1) Recognize youth leaders in the disability rights movement;
- (2) Reaffirm a commitment to the full inclusion of people with disabilities in society; and
- (3) Recognize the disability rights movement as an important part of the history of this state and nation.

(e) Recognized resources for information, materials and speakers regarding disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Centers for Independent Living;
- (2) The Statewide Independent Living Council;
- (3) The Developmental Disabilities Council; and,
- (4) The State Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator.

(f) The provisions of this article are not intended to create a burden, financial or otherwise, for public schools, teachers or state institutions of higher education. ■

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