

Disability Activism:

State & Local Focus

The Children's Benevolent League of Washington started in 1936 as the first grassroots parent organization dedicated to children and adults with developmental disabilities. Now known as The Arc of Washington State, the organization was integral in ensuring that children with disabilities received adequate care, education, and social acceptance. It continues to advocate for quality services and necessary funding to meet the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.



In 1972, Troubleshooters for the Handicapped was founded as a protection and advocacy group for people with disabilities. Now called Disability Rights Washington, the organization's mission is to advance the dignity, equality, and self-determination of people with disabilities, pursuing justice on matters related to human and legal rights.

Starting in 2006, Disability Rights Washington worked with students and self-advocates to successfully lobby the Washington State Legislature to include disability history in all public schools and universities. Senate Bill 6313 was signed into law on March 26, 2008. It designates October as Disability History and Awareness Month, requiring schools to conduct educational activities that promote the historical contributions of people with disabilities annually, during the month of October.

One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project. Image from Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds



Washington Governor Dan Evans signs HB 90 into law on May 25, 1971, with members of the group Education for All. Photo courtesy of Washington State Archives.

"We exist because society and service systems are not always fair or responsive to people with disabilities. We work for change in policies, laws, and systems that promote:

- freedom from abuse and neglect;*
- legal rights;*
- adequately funded, appropriate supports and services; and*
- communities that involve everyone."*

Disability Rights Washington



Image from People First of Washington.

People First of Washington is a self-advocacy organization assisting persons with disabilities to be recognized as equals and second as people with disabilities. Its mission is to facilitate and promote public awareness and appreciation that "we are people first and our disabilities are secondary and that we are equal citizens in our communities." People First of Washington provides education in self determination, self-advocacy, and inclusion for communities in Washington.

In 1969, a small group of Seattle mothers formed the Education for All Committee. They, along with two UW law students, lobbied to pass legislation for educational services for children with disabilities age 3-21. Washington House Bill 90, the Education for All law, passed in 1971. It was the first education bill to be written and brought forth by parents and community members, as well as the first bill to direct that each child's education be the responsibility of both educators and parents, creating an Individual Education Program (IEP). The legislation changed education for students with special needs throughout Washington state and led to passage of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which ensures educational services to all children with disabilities



Rooted in Rights workshop participants learn how to make videos. Photo by DO-IT, University of Washington.



Rooted in Rights produces media to amplify perspectives from the disability community, producing videos, blog posts, and social media campaigns that center people with disabilities. The organization uses accessible digital media to support advocacy work on disability rights issues. It trains people to be agents of change through presentations and workshops on storytelling and how to create accessible digital media.

"People with all kinds of (dis) ABILITIES have the right to be equal and respected citizens in our communities. We have the right to work, live, have fun, make friends, take risks, and learn to speak up for ourselves."

People First of Washington