

HISTORY NOTE: Pictures give a look back at our state's disability community past

[Access Press Staff](#)

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Looking at old photos is an enjoyable pastime. It also provides insight into how life was in the past. Minnesotans with disabilities have been provided with a unique look back, thanks to the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.



LARRY SCHREIBER

(left) Ronnie Lawrence set the table with his mother. (right) Ronnie took a test, helped by Mildred Byrum, University Minnesota Institute of Child Welfare.

The council has used its website to post Minnesota historical documents and data over the 20 years, with its features *With an Eye to the Past* (selected images from 1950-2000) and *With an Eye to the Future* (2000-2018). Historical documents dating back to the 1860s are also posted on the council's website.

Council staff has worked with state historical society staff to find and post historic pictures of people with disabilities. The first in a series of the historic albums was recently posted, with pictures from the 1950s into the 1970s.

Many of the photos appeared in newspapers. One charming story from November 22, 1957, Help for Ronnie, explains that “The days when the only program for children with developmental disabilities was in state institutions are fast disappearing. Mr. and Mrs. Roy Lawrence found when they moved to Minneapolis from Kansas City, Kan. several months ago that their eight-year-old son Ronald was not a ‘forgotten child,’ thanks to public and private agencies and the Minnesota ARC.”

Young Ronald was able to participate in expanded programs for people with developmental disabilities, including day camp at Glen Lake. He was depicted taking a test and helping with household chores as a “useful member of the family.” The pictures were published in conjunction with “Friendship Day,” a door-to-door ARC fundraising event.

Other photos show children in a Minneapolis Elliot Park day program visiting a fire station, adults sharing chores in their new group home in Richfield, and candle-making as part of an Opportunity Workshop work program. One fun photo is of longtime disability rights activist Clifford Poetz, speaking as a young man about disability.

The look back reminds everyone that while things change, the desire of inclusion and being a valued part of society remains the same. See the photos on the council website.

Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles written by Luther Granquist and other contributors. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota’s disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of disability topics, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota. Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Contact us at access@accesspress.org or 651-644-2133 if you have questions. The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities.

