

History Note: Kennedy, Johnson were key community allies

by [Access Press Staff](#) // May 10th, 2016

October 2016 marks the 45th anniversary of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (MN-CDD). This article is excerpted from a longer organizational history.

In the 20th century, institutional living was the norm for individuals with developmental disabilities. By the late 1940s, family members formed the "parent movement" in response to overcrowding and increasingly deplorable conditions in state institutions. The movement spawned groups like the Arc that fought to bring about accountability and respect.

The ultimate goal became closing of institutions and the creation of housing in communities. When John F. Kennedy became president in January 1961, the parent movement had a key ally. On October 11, 1961, he stated: *The manner in which our nation cares for its citizens and conserves its manpower resources is more than an index to its concern for the less fortunate. It is a key to its future...we as a nation have for too long postponed an intensive search for solutions to the problems of [individuals with intellectual disabilities]. That failure should be corrected.*

In January 1963 a presidential panel issued recommendations for research, needed resources, treatment and care, education and employment training, legal protection and the development of federal, state and local programs. The importance of addressing "years of general ignorance, prejudice and superstition" was acknowledged as a major hurdle for progress.

The *MR and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act* passed on October 31, 1963. It contained three construction programs; established centers to conduct research into causes and treatment of intellectual disabilities, developed university-affiliated facilities to train professionals, and constructed community facilities so people could have a place to obtain services. Federal involvement continued. President Lyndon Johnson established a committee in 1966 that focused on residential care, funding for training for support personnel and volunteers, and making services available to all regardless of income.

In 1970, Congress passed Public Law 91-517, the *Developmental Disabilities Services and Facilities Construction Act*, to assist and fund states in developing plans for provision of comprehensive services to persons affected by developmental disabilities with a focus on deinstitutionalization and developing alternative housing in communities as a priority.

Guidelines were given for states to establish planning councils that would develop an annual plan and advise governors on services to improve the quality of life for persons with developmental disabilities. Throughout the process, the importance of preserving the rights and dignity of the individual was a priority. The councils were directed to organize and coordinate services offered by existing agencies and other sources, and provide grant monies to secure services and fund new initiatives and construction of facilities. With the start of MNCDD, change was on the way.

Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles. 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, www.mnddc.org or www.mncdd.org and www.partnersinpolicymaking.com.