

St. Paul student's website brings key legal case to life

<http://www.accesspress.org/2013/06/st-paul-student-s-website-brings-key-legal-case-to-life/>

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A 1974 legal case that was a turning point in the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities in the United States was a Minnesota History Day project. Lillian Lampros, a 13-year-old seventh grader at Capitol Hill Magnet School in St. Paul, created a webpage chronicling the history of Halderman v. Pennhurst and the closing of that state hospital as her project. The website covers an extraordinary amount of information on the history of Pennhurst State Hospital in Pennsylvania.

One of the interviewees, Judge Donovan W. Frank said, "Because of a project like this, it educates, informs and reminds citizens that it was not so long ago that we treated people like this and therefore the project itself will improve the lives of many!"

Halderman v. Pennhurst played a major role in the disability rights movement that is still felt today, and helped shape the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Many laws ensuring services to people with disabilities have been passed and people with disabilities are now integrated into the community. Notably in 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act required public schools to provide access to education and free meals to students with developmental disabilities. Another offshoot is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA, passed in 2004. It ensures services for children with disabilities.

David Ferleger represented plaintiff Terri Lee Halderman in the groundbreaking case. Lampros interviewed him as part of the project. "It is a great honor and quite exciting to appear before the highest court in the country, and I knew the importance of the case to so many people," said Ferleger.

Lampros also interviewed Alan Bergman, a nationally known consultant who explained how the court case shaped disability rights. "Disability is a natural part of the human experience, it's only a question of when, that is why everyone should advocate for disability rights," he said. "For the people who left Pennhurst and moved to community homes, the people were better off in every way we knew how to measure. After Pennhurst, we did similar studies with more than 7,000 people who moved from institution to community in more than 10 states; the results were consistent. This was probably the most successful American social reform of the latter half of the 20th century", said James W. Conroy of the Pennhurst Memorial & Preservation Alliance.

Many Minnesotans praised the website and Lampros' work. Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities Executive Director Colleen Wieck said, "The website is fabulous. We are very pleased that Lily Lampros chose to create a website that so clearly presents the history and meaning of Pennhurst, and the role that Pennhurst played in bringing to light the human and civil rights struggle of individuals with developmental disabilities over many hundreds of years. Lily's website is an educational learning experience that needs to be shared and studied to assure that this history is understood and remembered but never repeated."



Lillian Lampros: a seventh grader at Capitol Hill Magnet School in St. Paul

Cheryl Turcotte, Regional Ombudsman, Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities, Brainerd, called the website “poignant. I can’t imagine a professional doing a better job,” Turcotte said. She drew parallels between Pennhurst and the recent Minnesota Extended Treatment Options (METO) court case.

“Remarkable! It’s hard to believe this is the work of a seventh grader. It’s wonderful to see that this young lady is so passionate about disability rights,” wrote Alicia Donahue, State of Minnesota, Ombudsman for Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities, Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center, Anoka, MN.

Would you like to make history?

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, www.mncdd.org and www.partnersinpolicymaking.com